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THE  
MIDLANDS AND OTHERS.

BY  
HENRY LYTTLEJOHN.

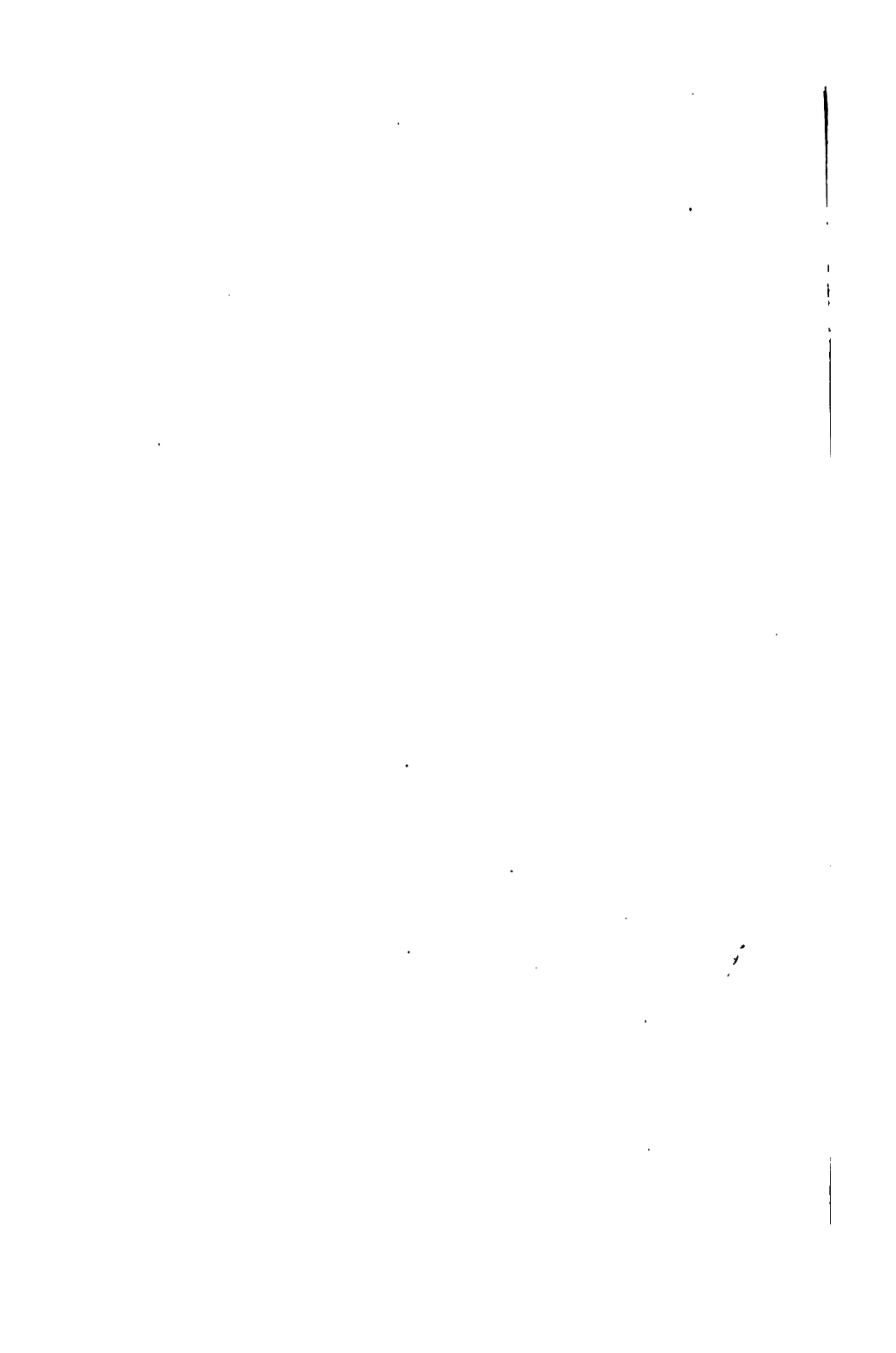
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## THE MIDLANDS AND OTHERS.

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### CHAPTER I.

WE must now transfer the scene of this pleasant little history from the limited stage of a country-house to that compendious theatre—the metropolis. Four months have elapsed since the Marquis of Northern took leave of Tinselby, and the party dispersed with the termination of the shooting. We are in the beginning of June. The lilacs are still in blossom, and the roses on youthful cheeks have not quite faded in the pestiferous atmosphere of the stifling ball-rooms. The park is full,



though not full as we see it now. Thirty years ago, you and I, my reader—being persons of fashion—hardly saw a face we could not put a name to: now, forsooth, the exception is the face we know. The railways bring their legions from the provinces. Cotton and iron are hourly changing into gold; and gold turns readily into carriages and horses.

The gorgeous dame, and her three young ladies in pink muslin, who lounge in that magnificent barouche, are not (as an admiring provincial s whispering to an ignorant friend) the wife and daughters of one of the princes of the blood; they are neither Tudors nor Plantagenets; nay, not even 'noble' in the polite sense of that euphonious word. Perhaps you never heard the name of Bundy. Probably not. Yet twenty years ago the intrepid apprentice to a small

cheesemonger in Newgate Street, E.C., left his native land to seek a wider field for his casine energies in Australia. Young Bundy was successful. (*Ecce signum.*) He began with grocery, and culminated in a bank. That carriage and its contents are Bundy's. And is not Mrs. Bundy also a success? Are not her parties (as her husband has it) "quite the cheese"? Yet Mrs. B. was once a barmaid in the colonies; and served ambrosia, by the penn'orth, to affable mariners and convivial vagabonds from Norfolk Island. The two eldest girls have made their curtseys in the royal presence, and Miss Eliza Jane will be introduced before the season's over. The equipage following contains another distinguished member of the plutocracy, — Dewsbury, M.P., who has long revelled in the proceeds of a successful trade in shoddy. The gentleman driving

those dashing steppers in that splendid curricule was stock-broker to the great Cheetem and Doem Co. Him, we may designate in these days as a 'representative man.' There is no end to the men of his special order of genius. Chairmen of companies, directors of companies, secretaries to companies, brokers to companies, lawyers to companies, contractors and engineers to companies. In short, every sort of functionary, who being intrusted with other people's money, has, with immense industry and talent, saved it from being lost, by putting it into his own pockets. The park, I say, is full of such. Piccadilly is choked with their horses and their chariots.

Bond Street and its dazzling shops are like a flower-bed near a beehive. Swarms of bright and busy little insects are flitting about its fanciful and fragrant wares. Some, flattened by the excite-

ment of last night's dissipation, loll languidly in the carriage, while mother or sister does the shopping ; and idly skimming the pages of the last new novel, compare the hero of the romance with the being who fills that place in the history of their own tender passions. The streets are crowded, the river is crowded, the theatres, the operas, the exhibitions, the courts of justice, the courts of parliament, and the churches, are crowded to suffocation. Turn which way you will, it seems as though everyone had agreed to be there before you. In a word, the London season is at its height.

And what has happened to the leading characters of our tale, during the interval of the four spring months ? We can sum the events in half a dozen sentences. Not a syllable has yet oozed out about the engagement between Lord Northern and Miss

Helen. Neither the one nor the other has breathed a hint of it to man or woman. The Midlands, the De Crecys, the Seabrights, are in town. Miss Mumford, as usual, has come up for her fortnight of festivities. Evans, Froth, St. Kitts, are also here. The Marquis of Northern is with his parents. And Mr. Wharton, C.E., having returned from the continent about a week ago, is, like all the rest of the world, in London.

In some measure every one here named is more or less interested in the movements of the others. We trust the reader is interested in all; for, it is the business of this chronicle to narrate how their respective conduct affected their respective welfare, how vice entails its own punishment, and virtue brings its own reward.

It will be remembered that when the marquis was laid up at Tinselby, Lord St. Kitts told his

friend how, after the quarrel at the covert side, he had caught Sir Percy Froth on his knees at the feet of Miss Helen Seabright. Subsequently we have heard Miss Seabright assure the marquis that there was no person to whom she had a more sincere distaste than Colonel Froth. Miss Nelly however was not one of those who are strongly governed by fixed ideas; and there are few people in the world less disposed to cherish malicious reminiscences than she was. Possessing by nature a buoyant and cheerful temper, she soon managed to forget whatever in the past would, if dwelt upon, have caused her pain. With respect to Sir Percy, therefore, she so seldom gave him a thought that it is not too much to say she had almost pardoned him. To be sure, he had done his best to make amends for his abominable insults. On his knees, as St. Kitts had truly stated,

he had implored the offended girl's forgiveness. And as on this occasion of doing penance, he had the tact to abstain from untimely supplications for future favour, Helen good-naturedly promised to think no more of his impertinence, and she had little difficulty in keeping her word.

It will hardly be supposed that love of approbation, or fear of the contrary, were either of them the sole motives for the gallant colonel's behaviour. Truth is, never at any time did he abandon the hope of winning Miss Nelly's fortune. The season of the year was one which led him, indirectly, to contemplate this attractive feature about her with special earnestness and warmth of desire. It was the season of Christmas bills: the season when an epidemical rapacity pervades the whole tribe of creditors. And when this plague set in, it never failed to visit him with its severest symp-

toms. Nor was it only implacable tradesmen who besieged him with their unseemly importunities. About this time of year there were usually a number of Sir Percy's acquaintances—sons, no doubt, of the tribe of Israel—who reminded him, in the most unequivocal manner, of his engagements in the form of promissory notes, which must either be renewed at a ruinous cost, or else (which was impossible) redeemed as their terms expired. How to reconcile the discrepancy of existing things with the requirements of this mosaic dispensation, was one of the toughest problems of his exegesis. Yet Sir Percy was a man of vast resource. He had tried the green tables of Homburgh and Spa: he had tried the green swards of Epsom and Newmarket: he had tried Mr. Crockford's, and the Stock Exchange; but all of them with equal ill-success. Every one of these expedients left him consider-



ably poorer than they found him. The only source of income which was the least to be relied upon, was his billiards and his cards. He played at both every day of his life; and won a sufficient sum from the young ensigns at his club, to enable him to live 'respectably.' Still a portion of these winnings had to be 'frittered away,' in pacifying the most rapacious of his creditors; and there remained positively but one means of living as became his station and his tastes. Some sacrifice was inevitable: and marriage must be its form.

This point once decided, and the heiress found, Colonel Froth was not the man to depart from his purpose, while energy and perseverance held out any hope of success. Fortunately for him, his emotions though violent, seldom interfered with his calmer judgment; and where other men might have given in from want of encouragement or actual rebuffs,

Froth gathered from failure hints from which he learnt to win. No character however is so consistent but it will sometimes disappoint itself? On the day of Northern's accident, one *petit verre* too much had thrown the colonel off his guard. His jealousy and ill-temper for the moment got the better of him; and, as he afterwards admitted to himself, he nearly lost the game by letting a single card slip from his careless hand. Heiresses, as Froth well knew, are not so plentiful as blackberries; and he might look about him for a long time ere he fell in with such another as Miss Seabright. In spite of her repugnance, in spite of rivals, she *must* be won. This was the feeling with which he left Tinselby, and with this feeling he awaited the arrival of his prey in town.

The secret of the betrothal was still preserved. How came it that the young nobleman had so

long persisted in his first request to Helen ? And how was it that Miss Nelly failed to obtain his consent to an announcement ? Is it possible that his lordship could have repented of his impulse the moment after he had carried it into execution ? Is it possible that Helen Seabright found, on examining her heart, that its dearest wish was not after all to become a duchess ? Poor Northern ! Poor Nelly ! how well you both knew that you had made a blunder—a blunder that it was now too late to rectify. This was not the bliss you once so fondly promised yourselves. You never can make each other happy. You do not love each other, my children ; and what is more—you know it.

At first, Miss Helen, in the brilliancy of her future prospects, believed her heart was no less satisfied than her ambition ; but Northern's letters were not those of an impassioned lover. Why

was he so anxious for concealment? Her womanly instincts too surely solved that riddle. A thousand trifling incidents recurred, which told her, with painful certainty, who it was that stood between her and her future husband's love. She shuddered at the conviction which could not be evaded. Why had she been so dazzled by those fallacious splendours, which, now that she had won them, were comparatively worthless? Was it not better to be loved—really and truly loved, as she herself felt capable of loving—than to be even Lord Northern's wife, and alas! to him, a bore? Why had she been so false to Wharton? He loved her: there was no question about that. Yes, Wharton worshipped her; and, poor fellow! fancied her fidelity was equal to his own.

As to the Marquis of Northern: what chance had he of quenching the raging flames to which

he had so long been adding fuel? Procrastination was of no avail. The longer he took to think of his marriage with Helen, the more irksome the thought became to him. He had been fond of Helen all his life, sincerely fond of her; but since their engagement he had been so constantly driving her from his mind as an idea only associated with pain, that at last he had come, in spite of himself, to actually dislike her. He fought against this feeling as he had fought against the cause of it; but just as he had failed to wean himself from his love for Daisy, so he failed to arrest his growing aversion to poor Helen. They were all in London now. And though he went but little into society, wherever he did go he was sure to meet Lady de Crecy and Miss Seabright. The former he studiously shunned; the latter he forced himself as studiously to be courteous to.

These were dismal days for the unlucky pair. Many a night the naturally light-hearted Nelly went home jaded from a ball-room which once she would have thought a paradise, to lay her throbbing head upon her pillow, and cry herself to unrefreshing sleep. Northern's wan cheeks and sunken eyes betokened the fierceness of the struggle which he too was undergoing. He knew that he could not hide from Nelly the anguish which consumed him; and he perceived plainly enough that she was made to suffer by it. But unfortunately he misinterpreted her sorrow. Had he conjectured that she wished to be released from their mutual pledge, how joyfully he would have set her free. Unhappily he fancied that she loved him without hope (as indeed he had known too many other silly creatures do before :) hence it became with him a point of honour to keep faith

with her. It would, he felt, be unchivalrous and base to cast her off; especially as it was entirely his own fault that she was placed in this predicament.

Such was the melancholy attitude of affairs, when our friend the engineer, deeming that he had allowed Helen time enough to recover from his premature declaration, left his business abroad to prosecute his private interests at home. Before Wharton showed himself in those purlieus of the gay city where he was likely to fall in with the lady of his affections, he sought the counsel of his dear ally Miss Mumford. It had been preconcerted some time beforehand, that Wharton was to come back, and that Miss Lavinia was to be in London to receive him whenever the Seabrights should arrive there, or whenever the old maid should hoist the signal for the young man's

recall. Mr. Mombrun had of course been consulted, not by Wharton, but by the spinster. The latter had informed the engineer's father she was not without hope that this time the dear boy would be rewarded for his constancy. She had undoubtedly observed a change in Helen's demeanour and appearance. The girl had softened considerably. She had lost her brusque nonchalant manner, and was decidedly more staid and gentle, and (as Miss Lavinia could not but think) touched at times with an air of melancholy, which, in her opinion, admitted only of the most favourable construction. There were days, Miss Mumford said, when she thought dear Helen was on the point of confessing her regret for the past, and her wish to retrieve it by a different verdict. The girl sought her society more frequently now than ever; and though she would sit for hours



over her work without speaking—behaviour which Miss Lavinia had never noticed before, it was evident there was something she wanted to say, and which weighed oppressively on her mind; and Miss Lavinia was persuaded that if she waited patiently, a communication of the greatest importance would ere long be made.

Under these circumstances the motion was put and carried *nem. con.* that dear Hugh be instantly recalled; and that measures be at once taken upon his arrival to reopen the campaign, and carry on the siege with the utmost vigour.

Primed with the advice and encouragement obtained from a quarter in which he placed so much confidence, Mr. Wharton soon set about meeting the young lady in such places as would enable him to judge of matters for himself. He had called twice upon the Seabrights at their hotel.

But it was impossible to arrive at a sound conclusion from Miss Helen's behaviour under the embarrassment and restraint of interviews at which either her mama or some strange visitor prevented any conversation beyond that of the most ordinary kind. It was evident to him, although he himself was far from the enjoyment of self-possession, that at their first rencounter Miss Helen Seabright was agitated to a degree quite unusual with her. She made several remarks of a most inapposite character; replying to his questions with a nervous titter, as though she had not comprehended their import. And having occasion to change her seat, for no reason apparently except to turn her back to the light, she took a chair upon which Mr. Wharton had placed his hat; and had the misfortune to deprive his best beaver of one of its three dimensions.

At the second visit, he met one or two ladies with whom he was unacquainted ; and, whether to screen herself from his scrutiny or to divert her emotions, Miss Nelly devoted herself to her female friends ; and though she gave his hand the tenderest squeeze at parting, she hardly exchanged a word or a look with him so long as he remained in the room. One thing was certain,—there was no coldness nor indifference in her manner : that pressure of the hand was as eloquent almost as words themselves. His palm long tingled with the touch of her dear little fingers ; and he contemplated his crushed hat with the fondest of eyes ; and locked up that valuable relic in a drawer, which already contained a glove, a roll of music, and an autograph direction on an envelope addressed to Miss Mumford ; all of which were consecrated by contact with the same divinity. His

object now, was to meet Miss Helen at balls, and parties; where the crowd would enable him to observe, and also protect him from observation.

Three or four years ago, it would have been impossible, for a young man in his position at that time, to procure an invitation to the houses of those fashionable dames who eagerly invited Miss Seabright to their entertainments as a young lady of acknowledged beauty and prospective wealth. He thought with disgust of the mean struggles he should then have had to make, to set foot within doors open, as a matter of course, to hundreds of men like Sir Percy Froth, for instance, whom in his pride he looked down upon with contempt. What cringing supplications he would have had to undergo, what insolent rebuffs he must have then submitted to. Fortunately these obstacles no longer beset him; the Duchess of Midland, or

Viscountess de Crecy, had but to express a wish on the subject to my Lady Topper or the Honourable Mrs. Hopper (no matter whether they knew these ladies intimately or not), and although these kind people were "very full," and had "refused *everybody else*," they were always "most happy" to see a friend of the duchess' or of Lady Crecy's. So that the honest engineer had no difficulty now in going where Helen went; and of this he took care to inform himself, through the dear old agent who watched and laboured for him like a mother.

Notwithstanding Wharton's penetration, Miss Nelly's conduct was not so transparent as he could have wished. Some of the signs which rewarded his observation were favourable; others were extremely dubious and inexplicable. No sooner did he enter the most crowded room than his eyes and hers flashed instant recognition. One would

fancy she was always watching for his arrival, so sure was her face the first he saw on coming up the stairs or on entering the gaudy throng. Sometimes she flushed at sight of him, sometimes turned pale; and when he greeted her, she was tender and rather sad. Now, had it been as he prayed it might be, she would have rejoiced to see him; she would have been greatly animated by his presence. He, for his part, paid no attention to any other person, hardly took his eyes off her: this ought to have given her unmingled pleasure. But no: she was gentle, she was kind, there was nothing of her old coyness or coquettishness about her, but—she was decidedly not happy. Did it perchance mean that she was sorry for him? Sorry to have given him encouragement and hope, which had to be disappointed? There was a mystery about it all, which

awakened feelings by no means unmixed with fear. At any rate, he soon came to the conclusion that no impatient impulse should prompt him to throw away his last chance by a second hasty proposition. The end of the season might decide his fate; for the present he would do nought to mar it.

There was another person who kept a watchful eye upon every movement of the pretty heiress. Sir Percy Froth took most accurate note of everything that passed at these meetings between Miss Helen and her lover. It so happened that the gallant colonel was close at hand the first time they fell in with each other, after Mr. Wharton's return to his native land. The baronet was not a little staggered at the changes of colour in the young lady's cheeks, and at the palpable warmth and tenderness with which she received his rival.

The jealousy and hatred which he had formerly conceived towards the engineer had slumbered during the five months' absence of the latter. His half-formed scheme for injuring Wharton in the eyes of Miss Nelly had been almost forgotten. His information respecting Wharton's supposed criminality was so vague, his recollection of what his father had told him at a time when he took no sort of interest in Mombrun, and had never before heard the name of Wharton, was so confused, that to follow up the project, involved more labour than the circumstances of the case inclined him to undertake. But now that at every ball or party at which he saw the two together, the girl's behaviour confirmed him in his former apprehension concerning her preference, his detestation of the engineer revived; and the idea took more and more hold of him that the only way to avoid



his own ruin was to secure that of his favoured enemy.

But how was he to obtain facts relating to this unknown crime? This was the question which the troubled colonel was perpetually revolving in his ingenious mind. In vain he racked his brain to remember the history which his father had given him; but the tale had made no impression on him at the time, and his efforts to recall it were without avail. Were there not, he asked himself, such things as law reports? Were there not records somewhere of criminal cases? If he could but ascertain the year even, he might hunt up the trial. It could not be so very long since the affair took place. Wharton was not yet thirty—about seven or eight and twenty perhaps, (a mere boy would hardly be engaged in a concern of the kind with a man of Mombrun's age): this would

place the event within a range of ten years, possibly it might be less. There must be plenty of people who were familiar with the particulars, if he could but find these people out.

Sir Percy consulted his family lawyer: but that gentleman had never heard of a Mombrun. And although the solicitor searched the law reports of the last eight or ten years, no mention could be found of the trial of a Wharton. Froth was certain his father told him that Mombrun was tried for felony; he was no less sure the name of Wharton had been connected with the charge. It may seem strange to us, therefore, who are behind the scenes, that one so sharp as he, knowing as he did that Mombrun's present name was feigned, should not have guessed the truth. But the conjurer's trick which is so transparent when explained, is supernatural till we know it: so it was with Froth;

he was, moreover, diverted from discovery partly by seeking it in a wrong direction. And although his attention to his father's story had been arrested by the fact, that the preceptor to the Duke of Midland's heir was a man of blemished character, this was nothing to him. Who or what Mombrun was, in no way affected his interest; and as he had never heard of Wharton, this name would have been utterly forgotten but for the importance it had now become to him. In short, the whole story had slipped into oblivion, and he knew not whither to seek the information he now so keenly coveted.

The only person who, he felt, could help him, was Miss Mumford; but his previous attempts to extract the truth from this immoveable old lady, afforded him no encouragement to renew them. He might by skilful badgering get her to drop some hint which would serve his purpose; on the

other hand, he might awaken caution ; and thus frustrate the end he had in view. After constant deliberation it occurred to him, that amongst Mombrun's acquaintances there would be at least the average proportion of hostile ones. From one of these something might be learnt. In order to reach the acquaintances he must bring himself into closer contact with the principal. Mombrun would probably suspect him : as a rule all scoundrels were suspicious. Miss Lavinia would also have repeated their conversation at the cottage. No matter : the difficulties of the pursuit added to its zest. There was a genuine pleasure in pitting his cunning against that of another rogue ; and the audacity of carrying on operations under the nose of Mombrun himself—in his very house, in fact, as he now resolved to do, tickled his vanity, and catered to his natural relish for intrigue.

## CHAPTER II.

No man, who has the least pretence to connection with the world of fashion, neglects to register his name on that aristocratic roll—the Metropolitan Court Guide. The proud descendant of a banished Huguenot, the representative of an ancient and noble lineage (as Mombrun professed to be), was the last to be guilty of such omission. Sir Percy Froth looked in that directory for Mombrun's name, and found the double address, 77, Brompton Road ; Château Mombrun, Guernsey. The baronet called a hackney-coach, and drove to the London residence of the *ci-devant* nobleman.

Had Colonel Froth been addicted to moralizing, the tenement now occupied by the family Mombrun might, when contrasted with the alleged antecedents, have suggested some solemn meditations upon the transientness of human greatness. Froth however was intent upon other business. On being shown into a dingy apartment at the back of an upholsterer's shop, he was struck with the shabbiness and extreme discomfort of the abode. The slatternly girl who conducted him through the dark and narrow passage requested him to take a seat ; adding that her mistress would wait upon him immediately. Adjoining the room in which he found himself, was another, separated by a glass door, upon whose painted panes were scratched a variety of grotesque figures, which might have been designed either by a very juvenile artist or the cat. The colonel having examined

the furniture (the only peculiarity of which consisted in its dilapidated state), was meditating a peep through the scratches of the glazed panels, when the door itself opened; and a slight and rather pretty woman advanced with a curtsy and said,

“Sir Percy Froth, I believe, sir?”

“Yes,” replied the baronet, with a courteous bow; “I came to pay a visit to my friend, Mr. Mombrun; whom I have had the pleasure of meeting on several occasions at Tramways Castle—the Duke of Midland’s.”

“O yes,” says the lady, “I have heard Mr. Mombrun mention your name, Sir Percy, a-many times. I’m sorry my ’usband is not at home just now, sir. But perhaps if you ain’t in a hurry he’ll soon be back. His movements is very irreg’lar; some days he stops out till late, then

again some days he doesn't. I'm sure he'd wish for you to wait if you've any partic'lar business with him."

"You mean to say," exclaimed the colonel "that you are Mr. Mombrun's wife? Why, my dear madam, I should have taken you for his daughter; so young and, allow me to add, so lovely."

"Well there now!" cries the lady, with a laugh: "I'm afraid, Sir Percy, you're a dreadful flatterer. There is a difference in our years, to be sure. But you see, sir, him being acquainted with father so long, and seeing me ever since I was a child, it seems to come quite natural like. Though if ever I'd a thought what a life I should lead! Well there! But I wasn't brought up for the likes of him—so littery and that. I know it's very agravatin to hear a person abuse their



words, that I do; and Mr. Mombrun he never could abear it. But law, sir, he do snap me up at times; though I'm sure I allays does my best to please of him." And Mrs. Mombrun began to whimper.

"Really, ma'am," says Froth in the tenderest manner, "I am distressed to think your husband should be unkind to so charming a person as yourself. It is most unfeeling and unmannerly of him. I couldn't have believed him capable of such conduct."

"No," says the lady, still whimpering, "it ain't right of him, Sir Percy, and me so delicate. To think of what I have gone through for that man's sake! I've pledged the very clothes of my back for him: that drawer there is full of tickets for my things, this blessed minute. But it ain't a bit of good, for as fast as he gets the money he

spends it. And it's all I can do to get a crust for the children."

"Shocking!" exclaimed Sir Percy. "But how came you to marry such a man?" ("How came he to marry such a woman?" thought he.)

"Ah, don't ask me, sir," returned the woman, with downcast looks expressive of more than sorrow. "He was a dreadful deceiver, sir. But as Lizzy—that's our gal, sir—says to me only yesterday, 'Mr. Mombrun has such a way with him,' she says; which indeed she never spoke a truer word. But 'twas father's doing, my marrying of him. Father *did* take on when he found Mr. Mombrun was a courting of me. You see, sir, father had known Mr. Mombrun ever so long; and when he began to suspect he was deceiving of me, he swore Mr. Mombrun should marry me outright. And somehow father threatened him

with something or other which frightened him terrible, and made him marry me at once. I wishes now I'd never seen him, for I'm sure I'm only a burden and a trouble to him."

"Come, come, don't cry, my dear," soothed Sir Percy; "it distresses me to see you so unhappy. Is your father alive still, Mrs. Mombrun?"

"Alive? O yes, he hadn't been gone out of this room not an hour before you come in, sir."

"And you say he has known your husband many years?"

"O yes, many years; ever since I was a child. I think father had worked for Mr. Mombrun before he got to be a master."

"What is your father now?"

"He is a master builder, sir; and has been ever so long. He used to be only a joiner when he first knew my husband."

“ Indeed ! then he has risen in the world. I suppose he’s a rich man now ? ”

“ Yes, sir, father’s rich enough. He has eight houses of his own, and lives in beautiful style. His parlour is fit for any nobleman, I’m sure ; such a beautiful shandaleer with red and blue glass, and pictures, and all sorts. Father’s very rich, but then he is a man of business, you see, and says it’s only flinging money away helping us ; though sometimes he gives me something on the sly. If it wasn’t for him and one or two others, I don’t know where I should get food and clothes for the children, that I don’t. Poor things, they’re almost without shoes to their feet. I did get two pair soled and heeled last week, but when Mr. Mombrun see ’em, he snaps me up, and says, ‘ Do you think I’m made of money ? ’ ‘ Well,’ I says, ‘ Mr. Mombrun, you’ve no occasion to snap me up

so,' I says, 'the money don't come out of nobody's purse—leastwise not yours,' I says, 'though I do spend it on *your* children.' But it'll be the death of me soon, it will. Lizzy often says to me she's *sure* I shan't live long; and ever since she said so I beceived a palkitation in the heart; and I'm dreadful timid, and can't abear the thought of dying. Mrs. Beswick—that's our landlady as keeps the shop—says the end of the world is to be this year. Do you think it will, Sir Percy?"

"O stuff and nonsense!" says Sir Percy, "you mustn't allow yourself to be frightened with what Mrs. Beeswax says."

"Well, I'm glad you don't think it will, sir, for I'm so dreadful timid: and Mr. Mombrun he's always talking of sudding death and that, till it quite gives me the dodders, I do assure you."

"Ah, 'tis very sad. Still it is a comfort having

so kind a father. From what you say, he must be a most worthy man. It would be a pleasure to know such a man. You really must give me that gratification, Mrs. Mombrun. You must introduce me to your father—will you?”

“O with pleasure, Sir Percy. Father will be proud, I’m sure. He has a great fancy for the aristocracy.”

“You must arrange some little meeting between us. Will you?” said Sir Percy, laying his neatly gloved hand on the lady’s dirty one. “Some snug little party, at which we shall not be disturbed. Do you think you can manage that, eh? You must tell Mr.—what’s your father’s name? Joyce?—you must tell Mr. Joyce how deeply interested I am in your affairs. And by the way, he’s a builder you say: just mention that I am in want of a London man for some extensive

works at my place in the country. We might meet at his house, or wherever he pleases."

"I'll be sure to name it to him, Sir Percy. It's very kind of you, I'm sure."

The baronet now made preparations to go. After he had taken an affectionate leave, "By-the-by," said he, as if a passing but unimportant thought had struck him, "have you seen my friend Mr. Wharton lately?"

"Yes," she replied. (Froth wondered whether Mrs. Mombrun was acquainted with the engineer. To ascertain the connexion between her husband and Wharton was one of his principal objects; but it was not his custom to reveal his designs by unnecessary frankness to any one. On this occasion his wariness was superfluous: Mrs. Mombrun did not suspect Sir Percy Froth; neither had she any knowledge of the circumstances which he was

anxious to arrive at.) "Yes," she replied, "he was here yesterday."

"I suppose Mr. Mombrun and he are together most days, ain't they?"

"Dear no ! Mr. Wharton have been in foreign parts this four months and more. And I don't think he've been to ours more than twice since he come back."

"Formerly they used to see a good deal of each other, didn't they?"

"Yes they did, sir. But though my husband he was always wonderful fond of Mr. Wharton, Wharton don't seem so fond of him somehow. I sometimes thinks the young man is stuck up like—rather high you know, sir, since he's had so much business, and had so much to do at Tramways. For the matter of that, living with them great folks don't do my husband much good



neither. I'm sure he comes home worse 'an he went away. What with the children, and tradesmen, and one thing and another to worrit him, he never comes back but he snaps me up worse 'an ever—he do indeed, Sir Percy. And as Lizzy know, and so does Mrs. Beswick, I does my best to please him ! ”

“ I'm convinced you do, my dear madam. A man must be a brute not to be happy with a woman like you. A brute, I say. Ah ! if it had been my lot to be blessed with such a treasure.”

“ Well there, sir, *he* used to talk like that once. But men is such deceivers.”

“ You wouldn't say that, if you knew me, dear Mrs. Mombrun. You little know what a tender heart I have. Heigho ! If I only—well, well. I mustn't stop here talking to you like this, or I don't know what will happen to me.”

Sir Percy looked up and sighed, Mrs. Mombrun looked down and tittered.

"But we were talking of Wharton," resumed the baronet; "I think you said he was in business with your husband formerly?"

"No, sir, they never was in business. Only Mr. Mombrun being a great friend of Mr. Wharton's father, so I've heard him say, he took the son to live with him when the father died—leastways was drowned, I should say."

"Oh! Wharton's father was drowned, was he? How many years ago?"

"I don't know how many years, sir; but I've heard tell Wharton was only a baby when Mr. Mombrun first took him. But father knows more about it than I do, sir; he can tell you no doubt."

"It is of no consequence," says Sir Percy. "The fact is, you have inspired me with so much

interest, dear Mrs. Mombrun, that I feel quite a curiosity about all your affairs. I was aware, of course, that Wharton and your husband were exceedingly intimate, but was not sure how the intimacy had arisen."

"Well, sir, that's how it was; my husband took compassion on the child, and brought him up entirely."

"Then I suppose he lived completely with Mr. Mombrun until you married?"

"Oh dear no. You see, sir, Mr. Mombrun was in reduced circumstances long before he married me; and consequently had to live a good deal abroad. And such times as he was out of the country, young Wharton used to be with a lady down near Tramways. She paid his schooling and sent him to college and what not; and stood to him as good as a mother like, and all out

of friendship to the boy's father, least so I've heard my husband say."

"You don't mean Miss Mumford?" exclaimed Sir Percy, with evident symptoms of surprise.

"Yes, sir, that's the lady's name; and a kind old lady she is too, as I may well say, for many a good act she's done by me, that she have."

"So, so!" thought the baronet, now occupied entirely with his own reflections, "Wharton was at Longthorpe when a boy, was he? The beggar has had all this start of me, and I knew nothing of it till this minute."

"And Miss Mumford?" he asked mechanically, "does she come to see you when she is in London?"

"She does indeed, and many a pound she's slipt into my hand. And the things she's give the children you'd be surprised if you was to see 'm. In fact, if it wasn't for her, and now and then

a help from father, I don't know what would become of us. Mr. Mombrun he is such a one for spending, no person would believe it."

"But doesn't Wharton help you? It seems to me that he owes everything to your husband; and if the fellow had a spark of gratitude, now that he is well off, he ought to show it."

"Bless you! Mr. Mombrun wouldn't take a sixpence from him to save himself from prison. He'd sooner we all starve together I do believe—than take that young man's money. To be sure Wharton's ready enough to offer it; and many's the time he's pressed me for to accept of it; but if ever Mr. Mombrun was to find me out, law, sir, he would snap me up, you may apend he would."

Sir Percy was more perplexed than ever at this proof of Mombrun's delicacy. "Joyce will know all about it," thought he.

"Too bad, too bad," he replied aloud, "to think that you should be sacrificed to such a husband. I declare I've no patience with him. A man who would not scruple to behave thus to a woman, and such a woman too, must be without a conscience altogether. He would stick at nothing—at nothing. A man like that would commit any crime. Maltreat a charming woman! and spend money not his own, forsooth! Why by heaven! my dear madam, your husband would commit a *forgery*, and think nothing of it."

Mrs. Mombrun sighed and shook her head dismally. Sir Percy discerned at a glance that she regarded his climax as a figure of rhetoric; in other words, that she was as little dreaming of the crime, as he was of an hyperbole. This then put the finishing stroke to his present investigation.

The discoveries he had made did not seem at first of much importance ; but he had paved the way to others. Mrs. Mombrun knew nothing more worth imparting. But her father evidently was in possession of the whole truth. His business now was to cross-examine the builder as soon as a meeting could be arranged between them. " Well," said he, as he took an affectionate leave of the lady, " if at any time I can be of service to you, you know you can count on a friend—a true friend, don't you ? "

" I do indeed, Sir Percy, thank you, and I'm sure I'm truly grateful, sir, that I am. I'm quite pleased to think you called. Lizzie said as I should see a friend to-day : ' I've a presentment, she says, ' you'll see a friend, and a rich friend, too ; and that he'll bring you luck, and perhaps lots of money.' ' Nonsense, Lizzie,' I says, ' do you think

so?' 'I don't think nothing at all about it,' she says, 'I'm certing of it.' She told me the other day she had a presentment I should ride in my carriage before I died; but law, sir, I don't think I shall, do you?"

"Well, I wouldn't say but you might," said Sir Percy, eager to escape this extraordinary garrulity. "Here is my card. And by the way, don't forget to tell your father how anxious I am to employ him. When do you think he could see me?"

"Any day, sir, I'm sure. I'll step over at once and tell him to call on you, if you please. When would it be convenient?"

"If he could call to-morrow about one I would be at home on purpose. If he cannot come, perhaps you will kindly write me a line."

Mrs. Mombrun promised to do so, and Sir Percy left the house.



As the baronet sauntered homewards, he revolved in his mind all the leading facts which the foregoing conversation had elicited. The circumstance that most forced itself upon him was, that Wharton had been a protégé of Miss Mumford's from his childhood, and had been a constant inmate of the old maid's cottage years before he—Percy Froth—had paid his first visit to either Tramways or Longthorpe. That his rival had therefore had a long start of him was one unpleasant feature in the case, for which he had not been prepared. But when he came to think the matter over this reflection was by no means the one which most staggered him. Wharton had been an intimate acquaintance of the Seabrights more or less all his life. If therefore it were true that he had been tried for felony, the Seabrights could not be ignorant of the fact.

If it were true, Helen would already know the truth ; and if she knew it, what more was to be done ? His whole scheme thus crumbled away at the very outstart. When the colonel arrived at this conclusion (he was already at a standstill) he stamped upon the pavement, and muttered an imprecation which astonished those who heard it as they passed by. " But do they know it ? " he asked himself. " The fellow did not live there always. I have been twice at Tramways, and once at Longthorpe, and though I met the beast once, I never heard that he had been brought up in the place, never heard him mentioned even. He can't have lived there regularly. He must have been absent a good deal—for some years perhaps. Who knows how long ? Long enough to commit that or any other crime, by Jove ! And if he did commit it and was tried, these people,

living in a wilderness, might still be ignorant. At any rate, that old harridan would hush it up—likely enough participate in the proceeds, and be d——d to her!”

In spite of these comforting reassurances, the gallant colonel was baffled by the uncertainty of his position. He had reached his apartments in Dover Street, Piccadilly, before his ideas had arranged themselves into anything like order. Nothing could be done until he had seen Joyce. But what could Joyce tell him that would serve his purpose now? Did Helen know, or did she not know? that was the question. He must solve that ere he put himself to any further trouble. He must see Helen, and worm it out of her. But how the deuce was he to work it? His own relation with Miss Seabright, at the present juncture, was so critical, it would not do to risk

offence. And yet the undertaking could hardly be approached without danger of provoking her. Having declared his own pretensions, he could not disguise the sinister nature of his motives. Helen would understand that he could only speak of Wharton as a rival. And if she had any preference for the engineer, she would not be likely to assist him—Froth—to do the other harm. At any rate, he must see her, and that if possible before his interview with the builder.

Sir Percy rang the bell, and dispatched his servant for a copy of the "Courier." In the interval he examined the invitation cards in his looking-glass. He had no party in prospect where he could hope to meet Miss Seabright before the week was out. When the list of fashionable arrangements was handed to him, the first that met his eye was "Viscountess de

Crecy's breakfast at — Lodge, Fulham." It was appointed for this very day. Froth had not received an invite. He had left his cards, but no notice had been taken of them. The omission was evidently intentional. "The row at Tinselby with the quill-driver," thought he. "D——d awkward! Can't be helped though. Must go. No other chance for a week."

The colonel then considered for a few seconds what course he should adopt. It was too late to write for Lady de Crecy's permission. "If she got my note," he reflected, "she's a wilful devil, and, as likely as not, would refuse me leave. Better take the chance of not seeing her. Yes, d——me! I'll go without." In less than half an hour Sir Percy Froth was in his cabriolet, and on the road to Fulham.

## CHAPTER III.

THE leafy month of June is in its glory. The weather is warm and beautiful. Dozens of smart carriages are hastening along the exits of the western suburbs, and accumulating in a string as they near the sequestered little paradise where the lovely Daisy holds her court. Gay young cavaliers, followed by their trim grooms, salute the fair demoiselles as they canter past in the same direction. Rank, wealth, wit, and beauty, all are speeding to do homage to the queen of fashion.

This regal lady receives her guests upon the

lawn. And here the eye may feast upon the choicest assemblage of nature and of art. Bowery mazes, flowery parterres, velvety turf—charmingly adapted, by the way, to the dainty little feet that press it; shady beeches which shelter cooing lovers, bee-swarmling limes, fluttering ribbons, coral lips, muslin flounces, Life Guards' band, Punchinello, Tyrolean singers in costume, Aunt Sallies, and a Royal Highness. Ah! what ecstasy of innocent joy elates the youthful bosom at the first celebration of one of these suburban Dyonisia! Harmless is the mirth! Ingenuous the devotion to the god of Pleasure! How eagerly the young votary listens to the fascinating tenets of its crafty priesthood. Come! let us crush the sweet *fragraria*, and dip our spoons in the bowl of creamy *grosulariæ*. Let us crown our heads with garlands, or don the beaver helmet. Our hands we'll deck

with skins of kids. These parasols shall be our *thyrsi*. Hark! how sweetly those scarlet minstrels summon us with pipe and flute to the graceful dance, Evoe Bacche! Io, Io, Evohe!

Does old De Crecy there (see him grimacing before H.R.H. and longing all the while to join the youthful groups); does he, I ask, experience raptures of this innocent description? He too enjoys the festival, but his emotions are more suited to his years. No silly visions of future bliss flush his encaustic cheeks with roseate hue. No unknown angel flits before his fervent fancy. The future those young hearts are fluttering so about, is only a past to him. He, long since, tore off the mask; and the veiled prophet remains to him, a hideous Demon of the Waste. The strawberry is not thy favourite fruit, my hoary bacchanalian! The thin fluid in those flaccid



veins more needs the fiery juices of the grape.  
For thee, old boy, we'll sacrifice the goat. Thy  
mirth we'll tickle with the crawling serpents.  
The *φάλλος* shall be raised aloft for thee. Yea,  
thou thyself shalt be a standard-bearer.

"Are you admiring that moss rose?" says his  
lordship to Miss Helen Seabright. "Let me  
pluck it for you." And the old man tugs away  
at the stem, which he scarce has strength to  
break.

"I'm afraid you've pricked your fingers," says  
the girl, with a wicked smile of pleasure.

"Every rose has its thorn," returns the leer-  
ing nobleman, whose wit was not always of the  
newest.

"But perhaps every thorn has its rose,"  
remarks Miss Helen's papa with his usual bland-  
ness. "Pray tell me, my lord, who is that

remarkable looking man talking to Lady de Crecy?"

"The fellow in the cloak?" returns his lordship.  
"God knows. One of my lady's artists, I suppose. No one else would smother himself like that in such a heat. Perhaps his linen is none of the whitest. People of that kind usually wear none at all, I'm told."

"Hush!" exclaims Miss Helen. "Don't you know who that is? That's the most distinguished of your visitors, Lord de Crecy. That's the Poet . . . See how all the great ladies are crowding to get near him."

"Bless my soul!" cries the peer, "so it is. Why of course! How stupid of me not to know him." (His lordship had never seen the great man before.) "I must go and say 'How d'ye do.'"

"My love," he presently whispers to his wife,

"introduce me to the Muse. So rejoiced to make your acquaintance," says he, taking the lion by the paw. "It's quite an honour, I assure you. Lady de Crecy is one of your most ardent admirers, as you know, I dare say. Lovely day, is it not?"

The great man assented to this proposition with a grunt.

"Are you writing anything now?" inquires Mecænas.

"Ah! that's the question," gruffly responds the bard.

"I remember hearing a great friend of mine say" (his lordship addressed the assembly with not a little pomp), "that he once knew a man who used to recite that great poem of yours, 'The Curlew's Call,' every morning before breakfast."

"Enough to make a dog sick!" groans the grim hero of Parnassus.

“Which?” whispers Mr. Evans to Lord St. Kitts. “The recitation or the anecdote?”

“Both,” replies the youth. And the two gentlemen make way for the great man; who strides off, with three young duchesses, and a score of inferior peeresses, and superior beauties, following in his train. It did not escape that merry rogue St. Kitts that a part of the poet’s dress was not quite as he would have wished it, in this company of fair women: These, however, were, one and all, in rapture.

While this gay cluster strolled down the lawn to the river’s side, Lady de Crecy turned to greet the Duchess of Midland, who had just arrived with Lady Selina and Mr. Wharton. Her grace frequently offered the young man a seat in her carriage, when she knew it was likely to be convenient to him. I think if he had guessed how

late the duchess would start to-day, he would have paid half a guinea for a coach, and have been there an hour sooner.

"I'm afraid we're very late, dear," says Selina, kissing her friend with infinite tenderness; "but we could not get away earlier. Poor Northern is not very well, and mama was anxious to wait for the doctor before we started."

"I'm sorry to hear that," returns her friend, with changing colour. She dared not say much before Lady Selina; for that righteous spinster had always a dagger ready to plant in the hearts of the wicked, and poor Daisy quailed before the stern piety of her friend.

"It's not serious, you know," added Selina; as much as to say, "I see you wince, but you can't hide your sinful heart from me." "It's not serious. But one never can tell what turn the smallest

illness may take. Life is *so* uncertain ! and one should always be prepared in every sense. Dear ! there's that odious Colonel Froth. I thought you said you would not ask him."

"Nor did I," said Daisy, with astonishment, "I did not know that he was here. I certainly never invited him. 'Tis just like the man's impudence ! I'll go and ask him what he means by it. I've no notion of that sort of thing." And her ladyship, whose blood was up, as the saying is, sailed off in pursuit of the offender.

But the circumspect colonel was keeping an eye on her too ; and having perceived that the conversation was directed to him, betook himself to the shrubbery. Before Lady de Crecy could reach him, she herself was detained, first by one gallant and then by another, who had been watching the opportunity to win a smile, or slip

in some pretty little compliment, which doubtless each of them thought was irresistibly fascinating to the hearer. Presently she observed Mr. Evans approaching ; so she at once made for him, and, in an undertone, begged that gentleman to protect her from these importunate brigands.

“ Ah ! ” said he aloud, “ I have been looking for you. I have some intelligence for your private ear, as soon as you can grant me audience.”

“ I am quite at liberty,” said she, and putting her hand under his arm, left her suite no alternative but to retire.

“ Have you really anything to tell me ? ” she asked as they walked away. Mr. Evans was the one person of the whole crowd with whom she was most glad to be alone. She was certain that he was in her secret ; and believed him to be Lord Northern’s confidant. She had seen very little of

the young marquis since her arrival in town. She was most anxious to hear some reliable intelligence about him. There was no one in the world she dared mention his name to; though she would have given worlds for a friend with whom she could freely converse upon the subject. Had Evans only possessed sufficient courage to take her confidence by storm, and spare her the awkwardness of admission, how grateful she would have been to him. (How often do men overlook the fact that daring on their part is all that is wanted to dispel the timidity of a woman's heart.) But even if there was no chance of his anticipating her wishes, there was an indefinite pleasure to Lady de Crecy in the society of one of Northern's most intimate friends. Evans saw him often, chatted with him—about her, perhaps; condoled with him,



which these timid beings sometimes startle us poor simpletons, she asked her companion point-blank, whether he had lately seen Lord Northern.

"I have," said Evans, who now no longer feared to misinterpret her. "And he spoke a good deal about himself, and——"

"And?"

"You."

"Yes? what did he say?"

"I don't know that I can repeat all he said." The speaker hesitated as if in difficulty.

"Pshaw!" said the lady, impatiently. "Here are people coming. Don't waste time."

"You know that I am in his confidence?"

"Yes, yes."

"And am now in yours?"

"Of course! how tiresome you are. I've a good mind never to speak to you again. If I had

ever guessed you had been so dense I should never have made such a friend of you."

Evans pressed the hand which lay upon his arm, and felt how completely this exquisite creature was trusting him, and how rare and profound was the friendship which this great trust implied.

"Best and dearest of women!" exclaimed the enthusiast, "how can the poor boy help being mad about you! But what's to be done? God knows how I sympathize with him." "With you," he was going to say, but checked himself. "There's no hope in such a case as this, but hopelessness. The disease itself must work the cure. When he has learnt to believe in the resoluteness of your noble character, some comfort may spring from his despair."

"Is he very unhappy?" murmured the lady in scarcely audible tones.

"How can he be otherwise?"

"I do not wish to be unnecessary cruel, but what am I to do? If he would only think of some one else!"

"All comparison at the present moment would but heighten his disease."

"Helen Seabright," suggests the lady.

"She's in love with Wharton."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite. See, there they go behind the yew hedge. They are making for your kitchen garden; no doubt to discuss the culture of peas and cabbages."

"Cannot you induce him to go abroad? To travel?—Some complete change, the prairies, for instance. Men are fond of a wild life."

"A wild life in Paris would be more to the purpose, I think," cries her hardened companion.

"For shame!" returns the indignant lady. "God forbid that I should drive him to such extremities." And her thoughts reverted with bitterness to one Mademoiselle Callypso,—that horrid Circe, whose charmed cup changed men into grovelling swine. "This is the one thing I am most in dread of. Nay," she added, "it is the only thing. It is for this reason that I have been so anxious to speak with you. But we cannot talk any more now. I must go and look after my people. You will befriend him, will you not—for my sake?" She gave him her hand, and with it, a look from those deep, glistening, beady eyes, that would have fired a colder heart than his, I ween.

Lady de Crecy had no time now to seek out Sir Percy Froth; she was too important a personage not to be observed wherever she happened

to be. In her own house, a hundred people were watching to say a word with her. Our baronet had calculated upon this circumstance in his favour ; and had hoped to make his inquiries, and then depart before his hostess came in contact with him. Up to this time he had evaded her ladyship by successful dodging : and during the five or ten minutes she was occupied with Evans, Froth had been seeking an opportunity to join Miss Seabright. Helen, however, was engaged to another partner. And Froth had the satisfaction of peeping through the yew hedge, before mentioned, and feasting his eyes, as another great and kindred spirit is said to have done, upon another couple, in another Eden. The gentle pair seemed happy, whatever they might have been. And perhaps Miss Eva was none the less so that the fruit she sighed to taste, was, now alas ! forbidden.

“O Hell ! what do mine eyes with grief behold !” mutters the envious spectator. And, serpent-like, he slinks away, cursing his own lot, and not blessing theirs.

It presently occurs to him, amidst his difficulties, that after all Miss Nelly might not be the best person from whom to ascertain the facts he wished for. What if he sounded Lady Selina ? Did she know of Wharton’s felony ? If the matter were known to the Tramways people, the Seabrights could not be ignorant of it ; and *vice versa*. Lady Selina would have no motive for concealment ; indeed, from his knowledge of her character, Froth had little doubt she would be most happy to impart any harm that she knew of any one. He sought her presence without delay. Fortune was propitious : Lady de Crecy was at a distance. Lady Selina was at hand. By a few

dexterous manœuvres he soon turned the conversation to Wharton and Miss Seabright.

"The duchess is determined to make a man of fashion of your friend the engineer," says Froth, "and he seems to have settled himself very comfortably under the ægis of her grace's name."

"We like him so much, and he is invaluable to papa."

"Yes, no doubt he is a capital man of business,—manages his own admirably."

"It would not be amiss if others followed his example," returns Selina, with a virtuous toss of the head.

"No, you are right, my lady, there is nothing like taking care of Number One, in this struggling world of ours. Our friend means to feather his nest pretty snugly."

"I don't understand you, Sir Percy." Lady

Selina was not sure but that the colonel's allusions might have some reference to herself. She would not have been offended if they had.

"Marriage," says the other drily.

"Marriage!" echoes she, "with whom, pray?"

Froth divined the lady's drift, and deemed it wise to humour it. "Ah," said he, smiling, "how should I know. In order to better himself, however, he must look above his station,—a good deal above it. But, may be, Lady Selina knows more of his aspirations than I do."

"Not I indeed, Sir Percy. I know nothing of his aspirations. I only know that Mr. Wharton is a very worthy and upright young man."

"Very upright, and broad across the shoulders."

"Why do you sneer at him? I'm sure nobody can dare to say anything against him."

"What people may say is one thing, what



they think another. Come now, Lady Selina, be honest with me. I know, nothing in the world would tempt *you* to utter an untruth : Did you, or did you not, ever hear that Mr. Wharton had some time, in the course of his existence, been guilty of a very serious crime? Did you ever hear that he had been accused of forgery ? ”

“ Really Colonel Froth —— ”

“ How do you do, Sir Percy Froth ? ” said a silvery voice, which, notwithstanding its softness, banished Mr. Wharton from the Colonel’s mind in a twinkling.

“ Lady de Crecy ! ” exclaims the culprit, “ I’m charmed to make my bow to you at last ; most impatiently I have waited for this happy moment.”

“ Indeed ! ” said her ladyship, haughtily, “ I should have thought your anxiety would have been the other way.”

“ You puzzle me, my lady.”

“ Then I must be less ambiguous. As I do not remember soliciting the honour of Sir Percy Froth’s company, I might naturally expect that he would abstain from seeking mine.”

“ That only proves how much Lady de Crecy undervalues her own attractiveness, and Sir Percy Froth’s devotion.” And the gentleman takes off his hat and makes the profoundest salutation.

“ Be that as it may, sir,”—the lady’s cheeks were now flushed with wrath (some cheeks turn white with this emotion; for ethical purposes we prefer the brighter colour)—“ I’d have you to know that, in obtruding yourself here without permission, you have violated the usages of good breeding; and—and I trust, sir, whenever we meet in future, it may be as strangers.” So saying, the majestic viscountess dropped a beautiful

courtesy, and turned her back upon the criminal.

"Stay, Lady de Crecy," cries the colonel, who was never quite at the end of his resources, "you are very severe, and very unkind. But are you sure I merit such cruel treatment? Are you sure that I am here without an invitation?"

"I am certain that I never gave you one. And what is more, sir, I never will."

"Nevertheless," says the baronet, "I was asked. And of course it is not my fault if the inviter acted without your ladyship's sanction. I am infinitely distressed at having thus offended. But you must admit that my conduct is by no means inexcusable."

"Whoever invited you to my house, Sir Percy Froth, did so without my authority. And I can only say, I consider it as gross a piece of

impertinence on his or her part, as I just now thought it on yours."

"Well, Lady de Crecy," says Froth, "I can but reiterate my regrets. But I never for a moment supposed that Lord Northern would give an invitation to your house, unless he had either received your permission, or was on such terms of *intimacy* with your ladyship, as to justify his doing so without it."

The damask roses on poor Daisy's cheeks were now suddenly changed to the whitest of lilies. She was so staggered by this brutal thrust from the heartless colonel, that she could find no words to answer him ere he had slipped away. So keenly did she feel the wound, that she had to retreat to her own room in the cottage. There, locked in alone, while hundreds of her friends and admirers were flaunting about her gardens,

the poor girl snatched a few minutes to vent her anguish in a flood of tears. This was the reward of her struggles, and her virtue,—that a wretch like Froth could treat her with the grossest disrespect, and then excuse his conduct by flinging taunting insults in her teeth! Where was the man whose duty it was to shield her from such ruffians? Old and decrepit as he was, he could not lack the courage to resent such injuries. But would the calumny appear so monstrous in this husband's eyes? Did not he too suspect her purity? Oh! what had she done, to be thus selected for the cruel lashes of outrageous fortune? The wretch! The odious, lying, impudent villain! How dare he impugn her honour! But he should smart for this! She would answer for it he had lied. Northern had *never* given him an invitation. It was the *last* thing he would con-

sent to do. And if Froth had used Northern's name without warrant, Froth would be held responsible for the lie. Northern would punish him. Northern would call him out. Northern would fight, and, and—perhaps be killed by him. Ah no ! better she should suffer a thousand insults than that. No Cunigunde was she to tempt her knight to brave the tiger's claws. *Her* Marquis of Delorges was much too precious ! Compared with his dear life, the good or bad opinion of this paltry colonel was worthless as a glove ! And so poor Daisy consoled herself ; and dried her tears ; and bathed her lovely eyes in rose-water ; and took counsel of her mirror ; which told her she was fair. Then she smiled, and went back again to her guests. And no one dreamed that she, who had been making others happy, had been so miserable herself.

## CHAPTER IV.

I FANCY Colonel Sir P. Froth, Bart., was not altogether satisfied with his afternoon performances. He had been balked at every turn ; he had been detected and punished by Lady de Crecy ; he had made her his enemy, and gained nothing in exchange. As he entered his lodgings he was accosted by two or three tradesmen, who had been seated in the passage awaiting his return.

“I hope, Sir Percy, you’ll be good enough to pay my little account,” pleads one.

“If you please, sir, Mr. Job bid me tell you he won’t keep the mare at livery another hour unless

you settle with him at once," says number two.

"Beg pardon, Sir Percy Froth," interposes a third, "Messrs. Billers and Cashel have refused to honour your draft; and unless the money——"

"Good heavens!" roars the baronet, "do you want to drive me mad? I can't answer a hundred people at once. I told Mr. Job I'd pay him before the week was out! if I don't keep my word I'll give him leave to sell the horse. Messrs. Billers be d—d! What's the matter with the cheque? Not dated, I suppose. Here let me see it. All right is it? Well, I'll just write to them at once. Any how you shall have the money without delay; you shall by ——!" And Sir Percy pushed his way through the duns, and locked himself in temporary security within his chamber walls.



When his servant answered a violent summons of the bell, the baronet was stamping up and down the room in a perfect fury.

"What the —— do you let all these scoundrels in here for?" he bawls. "Haven't I told you five thousand times not to let them up?"

"Beg pardon, colonel," says the rigid soldier, drawing himself up to attention, "tried to keep 'em hout, S'Percy. Would come in, colonel."

"Would come in, sir! Why the devil didn't you knock 'em down then?"

"Beg pardon, colonel, knocked one man down : says he'll summons me, S'Percy."

"Hope to —— he will!" swears the officer. "Serves you right for admitting him. Get out of the room. Here! Hi! You! Any others been here?"

"Yes, colonel, good many others."

“What did you tell ’em?”

“Told ’em you was out o’ town, S’Percy.”

“If they come back I am not likely to return for a month or two, mind!”

“Yes, colonel.”

And the officer proceeds to examine the pile of letters which, as usual, had accumulated in the course of the afternoon. Nearly all these documents were appeals from impatient tradespeople. Some urged their applications on the score of heavy and unexpected demands upon themselves; some pleaded the length of time to which credit had already been extended; several threatened legal proceedings; and by no means a few had actually adopted those measures, and had placed their affairs in the hands of their attorneys. Amongst the packets was a letter from the bankers. It ran:—

"SIR,—

"We regret to say that we are unable to comply with your wishes respecting a further loan. The £500 last advanced, together with the sum of £489 8s. 4d. overdrawn, leaves a balance in our favour of £1428 6s. 4d. The securities placed in our hands amount to £850, we must therefore respectfully decline to make any additional advances, unless under conditions in accordance with the rules of our establishment.

"We have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your most obedient servants,

"BILLERS AND CASHELL."

"P.S. The payments which you refer to, have not yet been received."

Sir Percy began to think that his affairs were growing desperate. But the more desperate they became, the more wildly did he cling to the only chance, now left him, to escape the worst consequences of his ruin. By fair

means or foul, the Seabright property must be his. His hopes grew quite infatuated as he pictured to himself the blessed relief which would attend his triumph over Wharton, and his possession of the heiress. He did not dare to look the improbability of success fairly in the face. The girl never would accept a felon; and once rid of this fellow, his chance was at least as good as that of any other.

These were his calculations as he tore up and bundled lawyers' letters, bankers' letters, bills, etc., into the waste-paper basket. Presently he was arrested in this operation by stumbling on a note signed "Jane Mombrun." The writer informed him that her husband had returned shortly after his departure; that, upon hearing Sir Percy had called and wished to see her father, he had flown into a violent passion; and had sworn to be the

death of her, if ever she dared to bring the two together. He had "snapped" her up dreadfully. So she hoped Sir Percy would excuse her; for it did not lay in her power to arrange the desired meeting. She took the liberty however to enclose her father's address; as she did not wish to stand in his light, in case Sir Percy should have occasion to employ him in the way of business.

It did not much matter whether he had to visit Joyce, or Joyce had to visit him. But the letter told him that Mombrun was on his guard. Probably therefore, before he could cross-examine the builder, the witness would be suborned by his crafty son-in-law; under these circumstances time was precious. Sir Percy resolved not to waste it. There was only one little matter to detain him: this was the subjoined note, which he found it

necessary to write to his friend Lord St. Kitts:—

“DEAR KITTY,—

“One line to say I can’t dine with you to-night at the club, though I want to see you more than any man alive. As I expected, those infernal scoundrels Billers and Cashel have stopped payment, *i.e.* of my cheques; and the idiotic lawyers have not yet concluded the mortgage of which I told you. The upshot is, you must do another little bit of stiff for me, old boy. It is only to renew the last bill for the two thou’, which, as a matter of form, I must get you to sign. Long before the stuff is wanted I shall have plenty to meet this, and also to wipe out our old score.

“After you left I had a regular shindy with the de Crecy. She pretended she hadn’t asked me to the breakfast. I suppose her temper was rather crisp because the marquis didn’t show. Of course, with my usual luck, I never got a chance with Nelly. That clod of a navvy was always in the way. However I have a rod in pickle for my friend, which before long

will make him cry 'capivi.' Please insert your signature where I have put the pencil marks, and return the same without delay, etc."

Having despatched the above, Froth tossed off a small glass of Cognac, lighted a cigar, and went in search of the builder.

## CHAPTER V.

As the wife had written to Sir Percy, the husband had rejoined his family within an hour or so of the baronet's leaving it. Mombrun was in a most excited state when he entered. Good humour was beaming in his ample and expressive countenance. Far from greeting the partner of his bosom with that morose irritability to which she was not unused, his manner was full of complacency and urbanity. Mrs. Mombrun, who was for ever embracing the two extremes of life's vicissitudes, began to think a fortune had been left them.



"My love," cries the husband, "I have asked some friends to dinner—distinguished friends—noble friends—friends occupying the most exalted positions amongst the highest in the land. Princes and peers, madam! Such guests as never yet graced *your* humble board, let me tell you. So, Abracadabra! Presto! out with the magic wand! Change this hovel to a palace! Summons cooks and viands for the sumptuous feast! Let all our people have new liveries! Let Lizzie wash her face; and bring, meanwhile, that bottle of Geneva from the cupboard in the bedroom. Yes, Mrs. M., the marquis, and the Earl of St. Kitts, have accepted our invitation to dinner. And the sooner you make fitting preparations to receive them, my love the better."

"Mussy!" exclaimed the bewildered housewife, "the marquis, and a earl! who ever would ha'

thought it! and when do they come! I'm sure we never shall be ready for 'em."

"The day after to-morrow, ma'am. So there's not an hour to lose. Where's old Beswick? Tell her who are coming. Say the House of Lords will adjourn to her back parlour on Wednesday evening at half-past seven. Say, with my compliments, the said back parlour must be decorated for the occasion with the costliest of her wares. These ragged sofas and rush-bottom chairs must be replaced instanter by rosewood and velvet furniture; failing which, let her supply such mahogany and horsehair as she can readiest command. The carpet——"

"Mussy! Mr. M. How you do run on! And where's the money to come from, I should like to know?"

"Money!" shouts the radiant Mombrun,

"when did you ever know me in want of money ! Look here !" and he held up a packet of bank-notes to the astonished gaze of Mrs. M.

"O my ! Well there ! Did I ever ! Where *did* they come from ? "

"The mysterious stranger to be sure."

"What ! through Miss Mumford ? "

"Through her."

"Well, bless the hand that sent 'em ! say I."

"Bless the hand that 'll spend 'em ! say I."

"We can have a fine turn out now," cries the happy wife. "Is any one coming besides them two lords ? "

"Hugh and Miss Lavinia."

"How father would enjoy it ! And Mrs. Beswick."

"Bless the woman ! Perhaps you'd like to ask the crossing-sweeper ? No, my love, we'll ask

them next day. Not another soul under the rank of an archbishop, or a royal duke."

"Come," says the lady, archly, "I know one gentleman we may ask. Such a nice gentleman. A friend of the marquis too, and a friend of Wharton, and Miss Lavinia, and everybody. What's more, Mr. M., he's a baronet."

"A baronet! Why you don't mean Sir Percy Froth?"

"The very man."

"And what do you know of him pray?"  
Mombrun's looks suddenly darkened.

"Well, he was here to-day. Called to see you, and sat with me for half an hour; and most agreeable he was too, that I will say."

"The scoundrel!" muttered the enraged husband. "What did he come here for? What did he want?"

"Well, I don't know what he wanted. But you needn't frighten me so, Mr. M."

"Frighten you, woman! I tell you you've had a visit from the devil! Ay, you may well look scared. That man came here to ruin you and me and everybody connected with us. Did he ask questions about Hugh?"

"Yes, he asked about Hugh. But how could I tell who the gentleman was?"

"What did he ask, and what did you tell him? There, don't sit gibbering like an ape! What did he ask, I say?"

"La! don't be so violent. I am so dreadful timid. You put it all out of my head, you do."

With a great deal of difficulty Mr. Mombrun ascertained the substance of the conversation between Sir Percy and Mrs. Mombrun. When he heard how she had referred the baronet to her

father, and had promised to send the latter to the colonel, he broke out with the fiercest execrations; and threatened the terrified woman with every sort of penalty, if she ventured to promote the promised meeting. He was so much disturbed by this unexpected proof of Froth's mischievous designs, that he hastened to give the necessary directions for the dinner-party, and leaving a few pounds with his wife to obtain certain provisions from such tradesmen as would not give them credit, jumped into a cab and hurried off to consult Miss Mumford.

He fortunately found the old maid at home. And although he had left her a short time only before, she was as ready to receive him as if she had not set eyes on him for a twelvemonth.

"Back again !" she exclaimed, hobbling up with outstretched hands. "You're just in time

for a dish of tea. But what has happened? You look unwell."

"I look as I feel then." He put his hand to his heart, as though a sudden pang had seized him.

"No, no, not that!" (She had glanced towards the bottle which he had used an hour or two before. Miss Mumford was accustomed to see him taken in this way, and knew the remedy he generally applied for.) "Froth has been to my house; found Jane alone; and questioned her."

"What did she tell him? She knows nothing," returned the other with unshaken calmness.

"She told him much that he did not know before. Every step helps the bloodhound along the fatal track."

"She knows nothing," repeated the old maid.

"She told him the boy was brought up by me ;  
was reared from infancy under my care."

"Well, what of that?"

"Do you think that lynx-eyed dog won't see  
through the story of the drowning?"

"Not he. He has no suspicion of the relation-  
ship between you. He is on the wrong scent  
entirely: he fancies Hugh was implicated in  
the——"

"Felony: true, but when he learns that the trial  
took place before the boy was born, what then?"

"Why, his scheme of injuring Hugh breaks  
down. His only object is to supplant your son  
in Helen's favours."

"His first object, I grant you. But when  
this fails, he will do his rival all the hurt he can.  
'Tis certain if he ever learn my secret, he will  
use it to do harm. It is not for the boy I trem-



ble ; his innocence makes him secure. From all you tell, I do believe the girl's in love with him. But, O Lavinia!" groaned the wretched man, "me, me he will expose ! me he will ruin."

"No, no, my friend, do not terrify yourself with such anxious fears. You too, are as innocent as your son. You stood your trial, and were acquitted. What power has such a wretch as that to injure an honest man ?"

"I would not care for the whole world, Lavinia ; but if *he* were to know it, my boy—my Hugh ! Great God ! his hatred and contempt would kill me." Again the unhappy man clutched at his breast as if a spasm were choking him.

"Hatred ! How can he hate one who has been to him all that the best and fondest of fathers could be ? He would pity and love you all the more."

Mombrun shook his head. "Even now he does not love me. I yearn to clasp him to my heart, to call him 'son': but I dare not; crime has made a coward of me. He despises me, and if he guessed I was his father he would curse me, and curse the shame I have brought upon him."

"Dear friend, you are mistaken. I do assure you, the boy loves you more dearly than you think for."

Miss Mumford bethought herself of the bank-notes which she had lately remitted to Mombrun. She could not tell him that the mysterious stranger who so often sent such presents was no other than his son. Both Wharton and she were aware that the faintest suspicion of the truth would cause Mombrun the greatest anguish.

"He has given me the *best* proofs of his attachment to you," said she.

“ Ah, Lavinia, you tell me this to comfort me. Would to heaven I could believe it ! But no, Hugh does not, he cannot, love me. And when this malignant demon has brewed his accursed poison, he will make us drain the cup, and watch our torments with delight.”

“ But I do not see how he is ever to learn the truth.”

“ Jane’s father,” returned Mombrun.

Miss Mumford made no reply.

“ Jane told him that her father was acquainted with the history from beginning to end. And she—poor fool ! has pledged herself to bring the two together.”

“ You have stopped this ? ”

“ Yes, but to what purpose ? The mischief is done. He now knows Joyce’s name, and can find him when he pleases.”

"You must at once see Joyce and caution him."

"What will that low vulgar beast do to help me out of trouble, think you?"

"You are friendly with him, are you not?"

"Friendly? with a brute like that! Heaven forbid the sacred name of friendship should be desecrated by such terms as exist between Joyce and me."

"But he would not wantonly do you harm."

"Why did he ensnare me into marriage with his daughter then?"

To Miss Mumford this argument was unanswerable. She could say nothing for the man who had robbed *her* of her treasure.

"For his own sake," continued Mombrun, "he will not expose me unless to gain something by it. But Froth will see through that, depend upon it. He will make a bargain for their mutual profit."

"At any rate, you had better see what can be done with Joyce; and, if possible, before Sir Percy meets him."

"I will go there now," said he.

"Let me know the result."

"Yes, yes."

"And in case I don't see you, the dinner party holds good for Thursday? You know that Lord Northern is unwell?"

"I had a note from him this afternoon saying he would come; there can't be much amiss with him."

Not long after Mombrun's departure, Miss Mumford had a visit from that gentleman's son. Scarcely a day passed but Wharton had an interview with the kind-hearted creature, who never wearied of listening to the young man's minute reports of his dealings with Miss Helen. Very

often their conversations were carried on while Miss Lavinia took her airing in Hyde Park. Every season she brought her own carriage to town. And many facetious remarks did Mr. Wharton's aristocratic friends make when, day after day, they beheld the young man seated in the old-fashioned vehicle, drawn by the shabby old white horse, and driven by the shabby old gardener in his tarnished livery, amidst the splendid equipages along the banks of the Serpentine. Her deafness obliged her to use one of the largest of trumpets on these occasions. And all the lover's little secrets had to be shouted through this convenient instrument. But the manly fellow was no more ashamed of his deaf old friend than she of her adopted child. What indeed was all that fashionable crowd to him, if he could but talk to the only confident he ever

trusted, about the only charmer who had ever enslaved him ?

“ Well Hugh, how did the breakfast go off ? ” inquires Miss Lavinia, the sweetest affection lighting up her weazened face.

“ Pretty well,” says he. “ And how’s the rheumatism to-day ? ”

His natural reserve always had to be coaxed away at first. He never would have opened his heart, even to Miss Mumford, had she not purposely ignored his pride, and forced the pleasures of confession upon him.

“ No worse, dear, thank ye, no worse. Bring your chair closer. I want to hear all about it. Was she there ? ”

“ Yes,” said Wharton. “ Have you finished your tea ? ”

“ Long ago. Will you have some fresh ? ”

"No, only you had better send it away; then we shall not be interrupted."

The young man's behests were soon complied with; but he happened to notice the bottle of spirits previously alluded to, and remarked, "Mombrun has called upon you I perceive. Did you give him the notes?"

"I did," said she, doubtful as yet whether to let Wharton know that Mombrun had been twice to see her, and on what account.

"He has no suspicion from whence they come?"

"Not the faintest. I have taken the utmost care on all occasions to mislead him. But tell me of the breakfast, my dear. Were you much together?"

"A good deal."

"And how did she behave?"

"Just as usual."



“Very friendly I suppose?”

“Yes.”

“Did you say anything pointed? did anything particular transpire which would show her meaning plainer?”

“No, I cannot make it out. Sometimes there seems to be no mistake about it: and then she suddenly changes, as though she were anxious to dispel the hopes she had the minute before been raising.”

“Do you think she wishes you to speak more openly? Have you made your own intentions clear? You must not expect her to make an offer to you, my dear.”

“She knows what I mean well enough. There’s not a bit of good in my speaking. Of course you can’t judge of that so well as I can. The least attempt on my part to approach a

declaration causes her most evident alarm. Not the mere nervousness with which a woman naturally anticipates the crisis of a wooing, but an apprehensiveness that amounts almost to terror. There seems to be some mysterious dread; something she wishes to conceal, and yet is half disposed to speak of. I cannot help thinking there is some insurmountable difficulty, which is at war with her personal feeling towards me. And yet, for the life of me, I cannot make head or tail of it. Is it possible, think you, that Froth can have been making mischief? You remember what you imparted to me before I went abroad. Can he have been lying to the girl about my connection with Mombrun?"

"I hardly think it. You see, to all appearances she is exceedingly well disposed toward you. He has not injured you in her esteem."

"No, but a fellow like that would stick at nothing. He would not scruple to tell any amount of lies. Suppose he were to tell her (what, in fact, it is possible he may imagine) that I was mixed up with Mombrup's affair. Though to be sure, as you remark, her manner does not look as if he had done this exactly ; but he might say I was a near relation of Mombrun, or some horrible lie like that, which would very likely prejudice her mind against the marriage ; especially if he told her also of Mombrun's suspected honesty."

"But who suspects his honesty? I'm amazed to hear you talk in such a strain. Can you then feel, that, relationship with Mr. Mombrun would bring disgrace on you, or on any one? I wouldn't give *that* for the girl," the old lady snapped her bony fingers with wrathful indignation, "if she

were biassed unfavourably by such a fact. I'm quite surprised to hear you talk so, Hugh ; I am indeed."

"Nay, nay," said the young man, laughing, "I didn't mean to ruffle your dear old feathers in this way. You know the obligation I am under to Mombrun is one I am not likely to forget. He was my father's dearest friend too ; I only say I would not choose him for a parent : there, don't look so angry at me ; I never breathed a syllable against him."

"'Tis bad enough for you to fancy even, that the relationship could do you harm. For my part, I have too high an opinion of Helen to believe she would be influenced for a moment by any scandalous tale that such a man as Froth could fabricate."

"Well, Miss Lavinia, I hope you may be right.

For all that, I am certain Froth would injure me if he could ; you yourself thought so when we talked of this before."

"Nor do I doubt it now. Unquestionably he would set Helen against you if he had the power. But I am less afraid of him than when I cautioned you in the winter. I think you are on a surer footing with the girl, now. I am convinced she has no partiality for him ; and I do not forget the letter she wrote to me from Tinselby. As to there being any hitch, such as you mention, I confess I see not whence it could arise—unless indeed it were her mother's foolish hopes about the marquis."

"Foolish they must be if she entertain such hopes. Northern takes no notice of her whatever. In fact, they seem less friendly than usual. They always used to be like brother and sister

together ; but now, they behave like ordinary acquaintances, between whom no special intimacy or affection had ever before existed. Besides, no one but Mrs. Seabright, I suppose, ever dreamt of a marriage there. I'm persuaded the father never did, and am equally convinced that neither Helen nor Northern ever did."

"That's true; and as there is no other rival in the way, I think, my dear, we may be sanguine of success."

## CHAPTER VI.

As Mombrun left Miss Mumford about the time Sir Percy Froth was sealing his note to Lord St. Kitts, the former gentleman obtained a few minutes' start of the latter. Though both were well aware of the value of time at the present juncture of affairs, neither could guess how important the few minutes were, which would enable him to entrench himself upon the field of battle, before his adversary arrived. Unfortunately for Mombrun, Sir Percy had kept his cabriolet at the door : and the baronet drove while the other was walking. Mombrun, however, was on the spot before him.

Now, Mr Joyce had no particular partiality for his son-in-law. We have heard this individual accuse the builder of ensnaring him (so he termed it) into wedlock with his present wife. Mr. Mombrun was much addicted to the figurative mode of expressing himself; but never more so than when on the subject of his marriage. Nor was the language he mostly used even so temperate as this. He poured his resentment into the willing ears of Miss Mumford, mingled with the fiercest imprecations on the scheming Joyce's head. Probably he insinuated (with what sincerity the reader may be able to judge) that but for this man's iniquity and his own confiding innocence, another and a worthier woman would have been rewarded for her long and tried devotion. The dear old creature, who believed every word he uttered, doubtless gave easy credit to a



tale so flattering to herself; and perhaps at times was tempted (tempted only) to echo Mombrun's pious wishes that Mr. Joyce's "eternal jewel" might be given to the common enemy of mankind.

The real truth of the matter was vaguely hinted at by Mrs. Mombrun in her conference with Sir Percy Froth. There is every reason to suspect that Mr. Mombrun's intentions, respecting the builder's daughter, had not been of a strictly honourable character. Mr. Joyce was certainly of this opinion; and possibly, judging by the date of the first child's birth, the builder's conclusions may have been based upon physiological and scientific data. Be this as it may, Mr. Mombrun was considerably allowed by Miss Joyce's father, who was in possession of the offender's secret, to choose between two alternatives—instant marriage—or, instant exposure. Mombrun

selected the former. But though Joyce saved his daughter's reputation, he soon discovered that he had not secured her happiness.

Between these two men it was not likely that any strong friendship should exist. They seldom met: for although Joyce paid an occasional visit to his daughter, Mombrun never suffered an opportunity to pass of sneering at the other's vulgarity, or broadly mimicking his slip-slop language: which so annoyed him that he kept away. To be sure, compensation was not quite wanting to Mr. Joyce for this forced severance from his child. He had the best possible excuse for keeping his hard-earned money (of which he was very fond) from the slippery fingers of his prodigal son-in-law. He made but little effort therefore to conciliate Mombrun; and the breach between them was always in the worst repair.

When Mombrun called Mr. Joyce was regaling himself in his back parlour, with a pint of stout and one of those long clay pipes technically called "churchwardens." He was sufficiently afraid of his visitor to treat him with some show of deference. Mombrun's cleverness, his education, his pretensions to gentility, and, above all, the domineering arrogance with which he asserted his superiority, awed the little builder; who in none of the above respects could pretend to cope with him. Joyce stared when he beheld the huge and portly figure of his son-in-law. He rose to greet him; and nervously ordered the maid-servant, who showed him in, to run and fetch another pint of ale.

Now, on his way from Miss Lavinia's, Mombrun had reflected that there were two methods open to him of dealing with his father-in-law. He might

either bully, or cajole. Joyce was afraid of him, he knew. Still he was in Joyce's power, and, as in case of the marriage, Joyce might, notwithstanding his fear, defiantly assume the upper hand ; Mombrun therefore considered it would be wisest to persuade.

"Well, my friend," said he, with most unusual cordiality, "how wags the world with you?"

"Pretty well thank ye, Mr. Mombrun. 'Ow's Jane and the kids? 'Aven't seen ye all, this long while. Take a glass o' something. Very warm, isn't it?" Mombrun was mopping his streaming brows. He had been walking fast, and his face was red as a poppy, and dewy as the grass in autumn.

"You're very good," said he ; "I don't know how it is, this stuff is always better in your house than I can get. Hang the sycophants! They

treat you big men as if your money were worth more than ours."

"Perhaps the difference lays more in the quantity than the quality," says the other, with a grin.

"You're right, I can't compete with you there; not many can in this neighbourhood. How you must be coining, Joyce. I suppose we shall see you in parliament before long, shan't we?"

Mr. Joyce doubted whether Mombrun was laughing at him, or whether he wanted to borrow. "No," said he, "no, 'aven't been doing much business lately. Business is very slack just now; a good deal o' money going out and precious little coming in."

"You don't want a loan?" says Mombrun, who saw the other's error. "Look here."

"A handful o' flimsies! Eh! you are well off, Mr. M., I congratulate you. 'Ere's your 'ealth,

sir, and plenty more o' the same sort." Mr. Joyce emptied his glass, and felt much relieved.

"Yes, I get a help now and then. I've some good friends you know—His Grace the Duke of Midland, and the marquis, and one or two others of the same kidney. They are all exceedingly kind to me, all of them."

Joyce was not insensible to such reminders that he himself was allied, though distantly perhaps, to the house of peers.

"Ah, yes," says he, "it's very gratifying. There's nothen like a respectable connection; yourn is first-rate, Mr. M. With your abilities and edication I wonder these 'ere nobs don't put you in some hoffice."

"Ah," sighed Mombrun, "they would do so, Joyce, if I asked them. But there may be reasons why I should prefer retirement. You,

my friend, may guess what those reasons are."

"Well, well, that's a long while ago, Mr. M. Bygones is bygones—that's my motter."

"D—n it! Joyce, I begin to think they never will be bygones. Would you believe it now! I have been threatened this very day," (ring-a-ding-a-ding goes the front-door bell. "Who's that I wonder?" interposes the master builder); "I've been threatened this very day with the dangers of exposure. It is hard that an innocent man (and you know my innocence was proved), it is hard, I say, that an innocent man should be ruined by the mere suspicion of a crime which he never——" (ding-a-ring-a-ring goes the bell again).

"They're in a dooce of a 'urry, whoever they be," says Joyce. "Excuse me, I'll just see who

it is." So away he trots, and re-enters with Sir Percy Froth.

"Mr. Mombrun!" exclaims the baronet, with well-feigned surprise, "who'd have thought of our meeting here? I'm delighted to see you looking so well," and Sir Percy, with the most good-humoured and friendly smile, advanced to shake the other's hand. Mombrun had not the command over his facial muscles so completely enjoyed by the man of fashion; but he could at all events control the lingual; and knew how to disguise the hatred with which the colonel inspired him.

"We all but met once before to-day," returned Mombrun. Then with an emphasis, which was not lost upon Froth, he added, "I regret extremely that I was absent when you called, Sir Percy."

The builder was quite in a flurry at this unex-



pected visit from a man of title. He flung aside his pipe, and began to apologize for the room ; and also for receiving so distinguished a gentleman in his shirt sleeves. He soon slipped on his coat, and entreated the baronet to follow him into the parlour. Sir Percy protested that the place was well enough : and expressed a thousand regrets at putting Mr. Joyce to so much inconvenience. He said he had merely called upon a matter of business ; and had no objection whatever either to tobacco smoke or beer. Joyce however was determined that Sir Percy should be treated with the respect which became his rank ; and the three gentlemen forthwith betook themselves to the parlour.

A blaze of light from a glaring cluster of gas-burners soon showed off the gorgeous splendours of the builder's room of state. Mirrors and gild-

ing were the main elements of its decoration. From the patterns on the paper to the cornice round the ceiling, everything was gilt, and all this gilding and all the gas-lights glittered in endless repetitions in a dozen looking-glasses suspended around the walls. The furniture was covered with dark red Utrecht velvet; and considering the suffocating heat of the evening, the general effect struck the elegant colonel as being on the whole oppressive.

"There sir!" exclaimed the little builder, with intense satisfaction as the gas blazed up; "this here apartment is more fitter for a nobleman, I think."

"Splendid indeed!" cries Froth; "why, there is nothing like this in Buckingham Palace, Mr. Joyce."

"I'm glad it pleases you, sir. What can I offer you for to take?"

Sir Percy declined all offers ; and Mombrun was thinking whether he should boldly lead Joyce aside, and warn him of the other's purpose. He resisted this impulse as too indicative of weakness ; but resolved to sit Sir Percy out.

Froth had not much difficulty in guessing Mombrun's intention ; and perceived with vexation the disadvantage at which it placed him. No sign of his annoyance however was suffered to escape. He determined to engage the builder in conversation upon business, which Mombrun could have no excuse in listening to ; and hoped, by the length to which he proposed to protract his communications, to drive his antagonist from the field. Considering that the baronet's country mansion was purely a *château en Espagne*, the elaborate description he gave of it did vast credit to his powers of construction. Mr. Joyce listened

to Sir Percy's details with the deepest interest; and assured the owner of this beautiful edifice that he—Joyce—considered himself especially qualified, both by natural aptitude and professional culture, to deal with buildings of the "medæval" style of architecture—to which class he understood Sir Percy's house to belong. Mombrun, who, from the first, had had his suspicion about the colonel's veracity, inquired of that gentleman what county his ancestral seat was situated in. And here some very ingenious lying took place between these two. For Mombrun pretended to be intimately acquainted with ——shire, and declared it was very singular that, although he had frequently spent a week or two with a relative who resided in the town of ——, which Froth had stated to be his post town, he had never heard of Sir Percy's place. But now that he had learnt

how fine it must be, he should reprove his cousin (whom he expected shortly to see), and should certainly, on the strength of his friendship with Sir Percy, if for no other reason, seize the first opportunity of visiting the colonel's mansion. Froth, who did Mombrun the justice to think that person's powers of invention were not inferior to his own, had little doubt that Mombrun was now telling lies as audaciously as he himself had been; so, with his usual blandness and courtesy, he expressed the greatest joy to hear that his friend would soon be in his neighbourhood; and promised to welcome him whenever he came, with the warmest cordiality.

What with talk of this kind, and discussions about the repairs and so forth, much time was consumed; and Mr. Joyce began to show symptoms of impatience for the departure of his guests

by repeated references to his watch. Neither of the visitors however seemed the least disposed to move. It was evident to both that their host desired to break up the conference, and was only deterred from so doing by respect for his future employer. Just however when poor Joyce's fidgets seemed to have reached the insufferable stage, Froth suggested that it would be easier for the builder to frame an estimate of costs were he provided with a plan of the house, and of those parts which it was proposed to rebuild, or alter. He therefore requested Mr. Joyce to furnish him with a sheet of drawing-paper; and soon commenced with great deliberation to sketch a picturesque design of the building. Mombrun remarked that the drawing bore a strong resemblance to Longthorpe Abbey; and it is not impossible that Sir Percy's audacity may have led him to

make the likeness intentional. Notwithstanding the interest Joyce took in this work of art, his impatience grew more and more intolerable. And seeing that his distinguished guest was so absorbed in the building scheme as to pay no attention to the hints which he was occasionally throwing out, he at last, with a good deal of hem-ing and ha-ing, and a thousand excuses for his rudeness, informed the draftsman that he had an appointment near Westminster bridge, which he was already very late for, and which would cost him " 'undreds" to miss altogether.

Sir Percy was only too delighted by this announcement. He said it was the most fortunate thing in life that he had kept his cabriolet waiting. He had no idea they had spent so much time in talking. But he had nothing on earth

to do that evening, and if Mr. Joyce would allow him, he would drive him down to Westminster in no time. The builder was proud indeed to accept this offer. Mombrun was therefore left to vent his mortification in solitude.

When they were gone the latter wrote to his father-in-law, warning him against Froth, whom he designated as "the biggest rogue unhung." He explained the object of Froth's visit, and assured Joyce that any disgrace to him—Mombrun—would act detrimentally on those who were most nearly related to him. He intimated plainly that he should hold Joyce responsible for any evil that might befall his wife and children. His wife was Joyce's daughter, and if the father voluntarily and gratuitously consigned his daughter to ruin, he must take the consequences. The claims upon Joyce's affluence which he—Mombrun—



had hitherto abstained from making would be justly pressed if, warned as he now was, Joyce wilfully deprived his son-in-law of that character for integrity and respectability on which his present subsistence depended. His connection with the nobility would inevitably be cut off. And it was needless to remind his father-in-law that, through this connection, he had the best hopes of advancing the builder's interests: indeed he had but lately taken steps with that view. It now depended on Joyce whether those exertions would be pushed, or by a suicidal act he and his family should be involved in one common downfall.

When Mr. Joyce returned he was not a little astonished at the contents of this warning and threatening letter. Nevertheless he resolved to keep the appointment for the next morning, which he had made with the baronet before they

parted. He rather chuckled at the notion of having Mombrun in his power; and began to calculate what percentage he should add to his profits for the sale of the information which Sir Percy was so eager to obtain. Now that he was primed as to the baronet's intentions, he could make his own terms. He was playing a game where he had the inestimable superiority of seeing both hands. Sir Percy might be very "deep," but Mr. Joyce flattered himself that he was "deeper." He looked forward to the interview; and promised to turn it into what he called a "highly profitable speculation."

## CHAPTER VII.

It is hardly to be wondered at, that the pertinacious ardour of Mr. Wharton and the increasing coldness of Lord Northern should produce their natural consequences on the susceptibilities of Miss Helen Seabright. Every day, as the season advanced, poor Nelly found fresh reason to repent of the choice she had made. As she was not much addicted to habits of forecasting, but, on the contrary, always ready to follow a present inclination, the struggles she put forth to resist Wharton were, to say the least of them, ineffectual. Of course, under the circumstances, it would have

been more prudent on her part to shun her lover altogether, to give him the cold shoulder whenever they met, to do anything, in short, rather than walk with him in kitchen gardens, screened from all the world by thick yew hedges, through which none but cunning Froths could peep. But how could Chloe be always wandering through flowery meads with her Daphnis, and not bewail his absence, more than the straying of her dearest lamb? How could she be always listening to his dulcet melodies, and not sigh to be the flute which pressed his honeyed lips? The brambles had often scratched her, but the wound had quickly healed; a bee had often stung her, but the pain was not so sharp as this. Poor little Chloe! The pleasure was so very sweet. And then, alas! so short-lived. Another brief week or two, and her secret would declare itself. The pang, the awkwardness of an

explanation, would be spared her. Her engagement with the marquis would be publicly proclaimed, and Wharton would then know through others all she dared not tell him now. All! did she say to herself? No, he would never know how miserable she would be. He never would guess that she had accepted one man while she loved another. He never would dream how little she cared for her husband, how fondly she adored her lover. Poor Wharton! How broken-hearted he would be when the truth came out. What would he think of her? Heavens! how he would hate and revile her! And could she bear to make him so miserable? How could she endure to be for ever accused by him, without the power to explain? In truth, an explanation was not possible. She had simply jilted him; and she deserved his hatred, and his reproaches. Oh! if she had only

accepted him at first. If she were but engaged to him now, instead of to Northern—who did not care a fig for her—what joy! what bliss! Fancy the whole business settled! no more bother about chaperons. No stupid men to dance with, who bored her to death with their worn-out compliments. No Sir Percy Froth to persecute her with his odious and insolent addresses. Freedom—perfect freedom. Nothing to do but to amuse herself. And Wharton! her dear old Wharton, always at her side. What fun it would be walking about alone with him before they were married. She would buy her own trousseau, and Wharton should go with her to the bonnet shops, and the milliners, and to the lace people, and the jewellers, and the bootmakers. Yes—she had a pretty little foot, and he might be allowed then, to see her try on her pretty little boots. And as

they would have to furnish the London house, they would of course make an expedition to the upholsterer's. (At the idea of the upholsterer, or his wares, perhaps, Miss Nelly laughed, and blushed a pretty little modest blush! which, depend upon it, would have set honest Wharton's heart in flames had he been there to see it.) The dear old boy! how he would enjoy all this. How happy both would be. And how—unlike other people's happiness—*their* happiness would last for ever, and for ever.

Poor Nelly! it was a sad shock to turn from pleasant day-dreams like these, to the splendid but painful reality which awaited her. Sometimes—and the feeling had been of much more frequent occurrence lately—she felt that she *must* again change her mind; and frankly tell Lord Northern that she had done so. Once or twice, when

Wharton had been more than usually successful (perhaps through compulsory absence, which he probably deemed long enough to cause the lady to forget him), Miss Helen was on the very point of breaking her engagement with Northern. Three or four days only before Lady de Crecy's party, she had actually thought over what she should say to his lordship; and had even framed her thoughts in becoming language. Unfortunately that very day he brought her a lovely pearl necklace, which was the more magnificent because the giver's conscience told him the necklace was a substitute for his affection. How cold must that affection have been, how utterly absorbed must the young man's feelings and observation have been in some other object, not to notice the effects which his costly gifts produced. In the eyes of his bride elect they were



If he were half a day without seeing Daisy, he was in a fever of impatience. He would watch at the end of her street, to catch a glimpse of her as she went out, or came home. He would go to crowded parties—places of torture to him, and hide himself in some hot stifling corner, from whence he could feast his famished eyes upon her beloved form. Every line of that form was photographed upon his heart; but as an artist devoutly studies some great model of the antique, which he is not allowed to copy, so Northern carefully rehearsed each lineament, that he might reproduce it with perfect fidelity when these precious moments of observation were gone by. Her changing looks were all analyzed; and, rightly or wrongly, resolved into their corresponding sentiments. This smile was plainly forced. That sadness was as plainly genuine.

She was talking to others, while she thought of him. But hark! her ringing laugh, how it jars upon his soul! *That* merriment was natural. And can she laugh like that, while he is only fit for tragedy? Away with this paltry weakness. Such agony is no longer to be borne. As well go crazy for the moon, as gaze away his senses with this maddening passion. Nothing short of some sacramental act, some outward and visible obligation, could lend sufficient potency to his will to enable him to pluck out this million-rooted fascination. In his marriage with Helen Seabright these formal conditions would be supplied to him. In these new and external surroundings he should find strength. His unaided inward resources would for ever fail him.

While Miss Helen therefore was wound up to the highest pitch of courage, and was fully pre-

pared to renounce for ever the brilliant gems with which she had once promised to bedeck her coronet,—a resolution, look you, which the most romantic of young women would hardly come to without a pang; the young nobleman whom she resolved to cast aside, had unluckily worked himself up to a still higher pitch of heroism. He came to her feet determined, partly out of justice to her, to clench the very bargain she was dying to cancel.

“I know what you would say, dear Helen,” his lordship cried; “I have neglected you. I have not behaved to you as I ought, as you had a right to expect a man would behave, to whom you had confessed your love. I acknowledge it all, Nelly. But you must forgive me. You must not think unkindly of me. I told you, at the time of our engagement, there were reasons,

private reasons, which I could not divulge, for keeping our engagement secret. Some day perhaps, when we both grow old (the marquis gave a ghastly smile), you may learn what these were. But soon, very soon, the objections I then had will be removed. In fact, I have made up my mind, quite made up my mind now to have our marriage over as quickly as possible."

If his lordship had been contemplating a dose of castor oil he could not have worn a more desperate or more woebegone aspect. Poor Nelly's fine resolutions were sadly shattered by this sudden and bewildering announcement.

"Have you told anybody?" she asked hazily.

"Not yet, no. The only thing I shrink from is publicity. The thought of congratulations is more odious to me than I can tell you. There is

no need that I can see to spread it about. You have no wish to proclaim it?"

"Well, I don't know," says Miss Nell, clutching at a straw. (If she could but find a plea to break with him!) "You promised the secret was to be kept for a month or two only. It is nearly six since we were at Tinselby. I'm sure, Northern, it has made me quite unhappy going on like this. What would my father say if he knew how I had treated him? I don't think it is at all right, I don't indeed."

"It is for so short a time that I ask for silence now," humbly pleaded the penitent.

"I really cannot consent to any further deception, Northern. I must speak to papa. It is treating him too unkindly. It is nonsense, if the thing is ever to be, going on in this way."

Miss Nelly's hopes being roused she felt almost

equal to an open renouncement. Unfortunately her spirit and animation so heightened her beauty that Northern, after considering it for a moment or two in amazement, said, "Well then, have it your own way. Tell your father. Tell anybody you like. The sooner the thing is over and done with the better." And in a wild and devil-mecare manner he jumped up, snatched a couple of fierce kisses, and dashed out of the room; saying as he went, "I'm off to tell the duke; I shall then go straight to the lawyers."

He was no sooner out of the house than Helen burst into tears. She was angry with herself; irritable with the circumstances; by no means pleased with Northern; disgusted at losing Wharton; ashamed to reflect on what he would think of her; and on the whole more thoroughly miserable than ever she had been in all her life.

Her first impulse was to rush after Lord Northern, and stop him before he announced the marriage to his family. Her next, was to write him a note saying she consented to delay. She also thought of sending for Wharton. Then she was inclined to summons Miss Mumford. Her mother of course recurred to her, but the thought was speedily rejected. From Mrs. Seabright she could look for no consolation : at least if the consolation she sought, was release from her engagement with the marquis. At last her father seemed the only one to give her comfort. He loved her dearly, and she loved him. He was always kind, and gentle, and wise. He was above any low prejudices in favour of exalted rank. Her happiness was all he looked to. Never had she felt what it was to have such a parent until this trying moment. She flew to him without

further hesitation; and found in him the sympathy and the wisdom she had counted on.

Mr. Seabright was not a little moved at the sight of his merry-hearted daughter in distress. True, he had noted a change in the girl's spirits during the last month or two; and in his own quiet way had drawn from these, and other little matters, certain inferences, which were much nearer the truth than a stranger might have given him credit for. His wife had penetrated a very short way below the surface. She too had observed a change in Helen: but judging her daughter's feelings by her own, ascribed the alteration to Lord Northern's palpable neglect. Again and again she had whispered to her husband that their darling was pining of love for the noble marquis. She also intimated that Wharton's addresses (which of course the watchful mother had



observed) were painful to their dearest Helen. Once Mr. Seabright had ventured to say he was not quite so sure on that point. Mrs. S. however treated his remark as usual with ineffable contempt. "It was not to be expected that men could see through millstones of this kind. She *happened* to know in the present instance that she was right, and he was wrong." So the quiet philosopher said no more about it; but adhered nevertheless to his own opinions.

When therefore Helen rushed upon him, and flung her arms about his neck, and sobbed in a hysterical way quite unlike herself, Mr. Seabright was touched by his daughter's affliction, but not altogether surprised. He knew that a crisis was about to be revealed to him, though he could not tell exactly what had happened.

"Compose yourself, my darling; calm yourself,

Nelly," cried he, patting the young lady on the back as though she had been an infant troubled with the wind. "What's the matter? Come, tell me all about it."

"O papa," sobs Miss Nell, "I've been so naughty not to tell you long ago. I don't know what you'll think of me. But it wasn't my fault: indeed, indeed it wasn't."

"Then I'm sure I shall not blame you, my pet. But what have you done? Have you refused Mr. Wharton when you meant to accept him? or have you accepted Sir Percy Froth when you intended to refuse him? You see I know what you are going to tell me, although you have been such a sly puss all these years past."

"No, it's not that, not that, dear," cries the daughter, gratified to find her confession made so easy. "Much worse than that: I don't know

what I shall do, I shall never be happy again. I'm sure I shan't."

"I am very sorry to hear it," says Mr. Seabright, good-humouredly; for he had no belief as yet that this alarming prediction would be verified. "I cannot imagine anything worse than your being married to the wrong man; unless you have decided not to marry at all, and have driven all your admirers to self-destruction."

"O papa don't joke about it, please don't. It is so very serious. I have accepted Northern, and we are going to be married at once."

"What, without my consent?" says the clergyman, with mock gravity.

"No, *never*!" cries Miss Helen; "and I do wish you won't consent. With all my heart I hope you won't."

"Well," cries the astonished parson, "I never heard anything equal to this. You tell me you have accepted a most suitable husband; and beg I will not listen to your choice."

"Ah papa, dear, if you only knew all about it you would understand how unhappy I must be. I have been engaged to Northern ever since we were at Tinselby."

"Indeed!" returned the father, seriously. "It was not right to conceal so important a matter from your mother and me. Have we ever done anything to deserve this want of confidence, Nell?"

"Indeed you have not," replied the girl, with tears of genuine contrition. "And it was very wrong of me. But Northern entreated me to say nothing about it. And I thought it was only to be for a few weeks; but he kept on

begging for more time: so what could I do but give in to him?"

"And upon mature reflection, you discover that you have acted without reflecting at all?"

"I thought he loved me," murmurs the young lady. "He said so, at all events."

"Have you any reason to doubt his word?"

"O dear yes. He doesn't care a pin about me now."

"This is what makes you so unhappy?"

"And quite sufficient reason too," says the indignant Miss.

"Well, 'tis a great pity," returns the parson, with a twinkle in his eye; "a great pity you should marry a man who does not care for you. Especially as you are so fond of him yourself, my dear. Possibly however you may be mistaken about Lord Northern's feelings; he has a

most affectionate disposition, and I do not see how I should be justified in encouraging you to jilt a man you have accepted, through what may after all be a mere whim of your own."

"I never can marry him, never! At least if I do I shall soon die of a broken heart."

"Why how desperately you must be in love with him," says her sly papa, "to break your heart because you fancy he is not desperate about you."

"In love with him?" cries Miss Nell, "I'm not a bit in love with him. Not I, indeed. I care no more for him than he does for me."

"Bless me!" shouts the parson. "This is stranger than ever: a couple of young people engage to be man and wife, and instantly find they do not care for each other! One would fancy there had been some mistake, such as I first

hinted at, that you had been wrongly paired. If there had been anybody else in the case now, any other young gentleman, for whom my little Nelly had a preference, I could understand her intention to die of a broken heart: but——” Mr. Seabright paused; and the arch smile upon his kind face was instantly answered with half a dozen of kisses from his blushing daughter.

“You *do* know then?” whispers Miss Helen.  
“But what is to be done?”

“My love,” said Mr. Seabright, gravely, “if you do what your conscience dictates, you will probably do what is right. I do not yet fully comprehend the dilemma you are placed in. It seems to me that you and Northern have both of you acted foolishly; I may have my own surmises about his motives; as to you, my child, I suppose you never fell in love with Wharton until you

had made up your mind not to have him.  
And——”

“Indeed, papa, I did love him ever so long ago.”

“Which of course was the reason you accepted some one else. However you seem to have no further doubts on the matter now, and the only question is—does Northern wish for the marriage or not? If, as you say, he does not desire it (and judging from my own observation of his conduct, I should say he can have no earnest wish for it), then nothing can be easier than to obtain release from your engagement. As to the rest——” Here again Miss Helen stopped her father’s lips with her own.

“But Northern has by this time told the duke, and duchess, and Selina, and everybody. And he said that as soon as he had told them all, he



should go straight to his lawyer. It will be a dreadful thing if it gets about before we can stop it. And then," Miss Nelly turned pale at the thought, "suppose he should insist on going on with it, what are we to do?"

"That would be very awkward," replied her father. "We would remonstrate with him, and let him know the truth. I cannot believe he would then persist. But of course were he to do so I could not unhesitatingly counsel you to break your pledge. Depend upon it, a woman loses caste by doing so. And however prudent the step, it always leaves a stain behind it. 'Tis plain, however, no time is to be lost. I will tell your mother what has happened, and how matters stand. Meanwhile, do you be off, and see Miss Mumford: she will give us good advice, and can communicate readily with the duke and duchess.

Her interest in Wharton, let alone her love for you, will prompt her to do her best."

Helen hastened to comply with her father's instructions; but before she had time to carry them out she had to undergo another painful scene, which will be described in the following chapter.

To conclude this, it remains to state that the rays of hope which for the moment brightened Miss Seabright's prospects found their way also into the dark recesses of Lord Northern's despair. But as they had to pass through a different medium, as it were, so they assumed a different hue. With him there was no more thought of a return to freedom. Now that he was bound by circumstances which he had ceased to have the guidance of, he accepted his destiny with sullen indifference. The final effort of volition made,

there supervened a sense of safety from the stormy unrest in which he had so long been tossed. For the present this feeling benumbed if it could not be said to soothe, his lacerated spirit. He had done the right thing ; and this of itself was a comfort. He would make Helen a faithful husband. And the reformation of his own character, the prospect of becoming a stern and stoical sufferer, devoted to public life and general usefulness, began to hold out attractions which already inspired him with enthusiasm. To be sure, his heart would henceforth be a blank : but the honourable ambitions of intellect, which Evans had often preached to him, were still open. Here he promised himself a refuge, and with the rapidly alternating emotions to which his impulsive nature was prone, he already anticipated the elating pleasures of success ; and almost wondered

how he could so long have been enslaved by such miserable indecision.

This was the day he was engaged to dine with Mombrun. At first he was inclined to send an excuse; but he reflected on the disappointment which this would entail; and remembering that he had entered on a new career of duty, courageously resolved to keep his promise. The very painfulness of so doing brought with it the unusual pleasure of self-denial. This night also a grand reception was to take place at Midlands House. All London would be there. Daisy—Lady De Crecy would be there, and then he would announce to her the line he had taken. She would be surprised to find what moral strength he possessed. She would never imagine how calmly he could behave under such a trying ordeal. But he could be calm—perfectly calm now, and per-

haps, now that all was over, she might be sorry that—pshaw! what was the past to him? 'Twas she who wished him to marry. 'Twas she who bade him marry. He would do as she wished. And pray Heaven might she be happy!

## CHAPTER VIII.

ABOUT the same hour that Lord Northern was closeted with Miss Seabright, Mr. Joyce was at Sir Percy Froth's chambers, engaged in rediscussing the subject of their conversation of the previous evening. As may be supposed, the building topic seemed to have lost some of its interest in the eyes of both. Not that the builder for an instant doubted the existence of Sir Percy's mansion, nor at all relinquished the prospect of being employed upon it; on the contrary, his professional engagement was the only matter he cared about: but his thoughts were now running upon

the secret, and upon the best manner of coining this valuable possession into money.

But the wily baronet was by no means so dependent on Mr. Joyce as the latter was disposed to imagine. Since Sir Percy's conversation with Mrs. Mombrun, he had had ample time to digest the various scraps of information with which that lady had furnished him. When he came to ponder at leisure upon the facts which she had imparted, it did not fail to strike him that Mombrun's voluntary affiliation of the boy Wharton was a somewhat extraordinary act of benevolence for so selfish and so needy a man as he. But it was still more remarkable that Miss Mumford should adopt a child whose only claim on her (so far as he could learn) was relationship—not to her own dear friend, but—to a friend of her friend Mombrun. Froth now remembered moreover that when he

spoke to Miss Lavinia at Longthorpe, she had let fall something about Wharton's age when the trial took place. Although she had not completed her sentence, her words implied that the latter was much too young to have participated in the guilty act imputed. The change in Mombrun's name, the story of Wharton's father being drowned, the coupling by his own parent—the late baronet—of the names of Wharton and Mombrun, all combined to persuade him that, at last, he was in possession of the true facts of the case. Of course it was far from agreeable to Sir Percy to believe that Wharton was innocent. His hopes of injuring his rival in the eyes of the heiress would then unfortunately be good for nothing: but in any case it was essential to make sure, by cross-examining Joyce, that his inferences were not mistaken.



That Joyce had been told by Mombrun of Sir Percy's intentions, since the previous evening, Sir Percy himself had no manner of doubt ; in order therefore to hold some means of persuasion, should his informant prove uncommunicative, the colonel took the trouble to complete the builder's hallucination about his country-seat. When satisfied on this point, he abruptly changed the conversation, and assuming a candour which astonished and considerably disconcerted his visitor, said, " Mr. Mombrun has told you, I suppose, that the object of my call last evening, was to ascertain some particulars concerning the trial he underwent some years ago for felony ? "

Mr. Joyce admitted the correctness of the supposition : but hesitated in his reply, as though he might incautiously be already parting with some of his profits.

The baronet calmly resumed : " As Mr. Mombrun's trial is fully recorded in the Law Reports, (I have them here)," Sir Percy held up a volume of the Racing Calendar, " the few facts which I am curious to arrive at, are simply of a private nature. It is on this account that I have put myself in communication with you."

Mr. Joyce, whose estimate had undergone a deduction of about fifty per cent. at sight of the Racing Calendar, was again raised at the word 'private' about ten or fifteen. The builder nodded and smiled, we may say he grinned.

" Allow me to offer you a cigar, Mr. Joyce."

Mr. Joyce declined. The baronet lit one himself, and puffed leisurely till it was well alight.

" I think I am near the mark," pursued Sir Percy, " when I say it is about ten years since your daughter married ? "

Mr. Joyce determined to be cautious. "Ye—es," said he, "yes—more or less, I should say it were."

"And, if I am not mistaken, she never bore any other name?"

"Well, sir, her name was Joyce before she married."

"Ay, ay, but I mean she never took the name of Wharton?"

"Never," returned the builder, confidently. He did not exactly see the drift of the question.

"It is ten years at all events," thought Sir Percy, "since the crime was committed." But he was careful not to betray his ignorance. "No," said he, aloud, "of course it was not likely that Mombrun would resume his real name. I fancied *you* might have insisted on his doing so, for the sake of the legality of the marriage."

"No one doubts the validity of the marriage," says Mr. Joyce, rather alarmed by the baronet's suggestion.

"Mombrun is a crafty man," observed Sir Percy, flinging another handful of the same dust in the builder's eyes.

"He's all that," returned the latter; "but by jingo! if I thought that under the shelter of a false name—no, no, he dare not do it, sir. He dare not do it."

"Possibly not; you have him too much under your thumb, eh? You might retaliate, might you not?" (Sir Percy chuckled.) "He is so fond of his son," said the baronet, at a venture, puffing a volume of smoke in his companion's face.

"You're right," coughed Mr. Joyce, "fonder 'an his son is of him, I fancies."

"And his son would be less fond if you were

to revenge yourself by letting out what you, and I, and a few others, know, eh, Mr. Joyce?"

The builder believed now that Sir Percy knew everything. "Yes, I've only to let the son know who he is," says Joyce, with a wink.

"So, so," thought Sir Percy. "Wharton does not even know that Mombrun is his father. That settles the whole mystery. I see it all now. How old," he asked, "was Wharton, at the time his father was tried?"

This was the first direct question he had put. Mr. Joyce thought once more of his profits, and replied, "Well, Sir Percy, I don't know as I'm at liberty to say exactly."

"Oh," said the baronet, laughing, "pray don't let out any family secrets, Mr. Joyce. There were just one or two unimportant little matters like this, that I wanted to know, and that I

thought you would not mind telling me : but it is of no consequence, none whatever." And the baronet began to roll up his drawing of the country-house.

"Well, sir, well," returned the other, eagerly ; "it ain't much of a question to answer, I allows. But you, see, sir, me being one of the family it wouldn't be right to inform agin my own belongings, would it, sir?"

"Inform? my good man!" echoes the baronet. "Who the devil wants you to inform? Do you take me for a detective? I asked you how old the son was when the father was tried, and you treat the question as if I wanted you to charge young Wharton of complicity in his father's crime."

"No, no, Sir Percy, not so bad as that. Of course it can't hurt nobody you knowing the

child was but a twelvemonth old at the time you name: but what I mean is, I objects on principle, —on principle, don't you see, Sir Percy? to telling other people's secrets; especially," added the builder, significantly, "when I gits nothing by it."

"I perfectly understand *that*," said Sir Percy, rising from his chair; and casting his cigar into the grate. "And if I should require any further information on the subject we have been talking over, I should not for a moment expect you to afford it, not at least if it compromised your relations, without being prepared to—to indemnify you, Mr. Joyce. As however nothing can be further from my intention at the present time, I must now wish you a very good morning."

"And the alterations to Froth Court?" cried Mr. Joyce, of the rueful countenance. "I shall

do the work at the lowest possible cost, Sir Percy. My profits will be a mere nothing, sir, I do assure you. And there's not a man in this town understands the mediæval style better 'an me. I hope, sir, you'll let me have the job."

"Well, you can see what I require. You can send in your estimate, if you please." Sir Percy rang for his hat and stick, and desired his man to show Mr. Joyce the door.

"I can't do that, sir, till I have inspected the premises. But with your permission, Sir Percy——"

"Well," said Sir Percy, putting on his gloves, "it would be rather a long journey to make for nothing. Perhaps you will take my sketch, and give me an idea on paper. If it suits me I can write and let you know. By Jove! how late it is. I must be off. Good morning, Mr Joyce,



good morning." And Sir Percy brushed past, and hurried into the street.

The worst apprehensions of the gallant colonel thus eventuated as he had foreboded they would. The infernal daughter of dark Night began to cast her gloomy pall over his future prospects. The morning's post had brought a score of fresh solicitations for immediate payment. And worst of all, his friend Lord Kitts declined to incur any further responsibility. Ruin now stared him in the face. His only chance was Helen Seabright. As he had forestalled the position in which we find him, he had with his usual decision prepared to meet it promptly. The instant therefore his interview with Joyce was over, he hastened to fling himself once more, and for the last time, at the feet of the Longthorpe heiress.

He reached the Seabright's hotel just as Helen

had put on her bonnet to call on Miss Lavinia Mumford. That the poor girl was not in the happiest mood to receive him, may easily be imagined. Much however as she disliked Sir Percy Froth, she could have no notion that he had chosen this particular moment to declare himself again. So she submitted to the inconvenience of his call, and flattered herself that she could speedily put an end to it. She was not mistaken as to the brief duration of his visit; but what came of it, was certainly unlooked for. Sir Percy did not waste much time, nor many words, in arriving at the point. He felt to the full, the vital importance of the venture on which his fate depended. And he artistically allowed the anxiety which harassed him, to display itself in his face and manner, hoping that the feeling, which he might have failed to put on, would impress Helen with the

sincerity of his attachment. To do him justice, the appeal he made was not altogether devoid of genuine sentiment. When he spoke of himself as unworthy of Helen's love, and yet not incapable of being redeemed by it, he did truly feel, for the time, that the portrait he was drawing of himself bore a sort of ideal resemblance to the original. Then too, there was a boldness worthy of the man, in his frank admission of the share which the girl's fortune had had in captivating him. To be sure, he spoke of this attraction rather as an allurements of the past, than as a matter which affected him deeply now. Still there was a semblance of honesty in the confession, which the downright Helen, as Froth well knew, was quite capable of appreciating. The colonel was so practised in the art of fascination, he was so thoroughly acquainted with the weak points in

the hearts of the gentler sex, that when he threw himself with all his might into an undertaking of this kind he was not so very easy to repulse. He was good-looking, he was perfectly gentlemanlike in manner, he could be as tender as the case required, and above all—the crowning qualification in love—his boldness amounted to audacity, while his self-possession obviated the alarm which his intrepidity threatened to create.

Helen could not but hear him plead his cause. More than this, she could not but listen to his eloquent declaration. She was touched and pained by his earnest looks and tones; but she told him that he sued in vain; and intreated him never again to ask her consent to what she had before assured him no power on earth would ever make her yield to.

“Tell me one thing,” said Froth, who saw now

that every hope was wrecked; and whose pale features began to contract with emotions which were far from tender: "tell me one thing, Miss Seabright. I have humiliated myself before you. I have made admissions for which you must always despise me. I have confessed a love I never yet felt for any other woman. And I think I am entitled to some consideration. Tell me one thing. Is the heart you have for the present hardened against me, irrevocably bestowed on some one else?"

"Sir Percy Froth," says the young lady, with firmness. "You have paid me a very high compliment; and you have spoken with a frankness that has not the least offended me. As to despising you for what you have said—that's all nonsense. I shall never think the worse of you on this account. But that you have earned a right

of inquisition upon the motives of my conduct, I confess I don't at all see. You must forgive me, therefore, if I refuse to answer any questions of the kind. I can only repeat that my decision as regards yourself is absolutely final."

"And do you know, Miss Seabright," said Froth, now livid with rage, "who the gentleman—the *gentleman* is, to whom you are so faithfully devoted?"

"I do not know what you mean, Sir Percy. But if you intend to insult me, I shall not stay here to listen to you."

"Stop," says the baronet, placing himself between the retreating lady and the door. "One minute, pray. It is entirely out of regard to yourself that I mention it. I am persuaded, my dear Miss Seabright, you cannot be aware that your friend Mr. Wharton is the son of a felon. I

see by your looks you doubt my word. If you ask Miss Mumford, she will give you the particulars. I dare say you would not care to hear them from me, so I shall wish you good-bye. And may you enjoy every possible happiness with—the felon's son."

More agitated, bewildered, and harassed than ever, Miss Helen hastened to obtain from Miss Lavinia some relief from all this misery. What was this story about the son of a felon? If Froth had not referred her to the old maid she would have known the accusation to be a lie. What did it all mean? Who was Wharton, if he was not a gentleman? But he was a gentleman. A thousand times more a gentleman than Froth, whatever his father might have been. What was Wharton's father to her? She loved the man himself. She cared nothing for this story unless

indeed it was another obstacle to her happiness. Let her but be free once more. Let her be released from this cruel engagement, Wharton should be hers, be he who he might.

When Miss Lavinia Mumford heard Miss Seabright's name announced, "At last," thought she, "the girl is come to tell me that she loves him." Despite her cramps and rheumatics, she bustled up to embrace Helen; and smiled in anticipation of the joyful news. She very soon however noticed the signs of trouble in Miss Helen's face. And with her usual patience checked her sanguine hopes, and waited for the girl to speak. Helen was too full of distress to observe any formalities in venting it. Her only difficulty was to decide what part of her story to begin with.

"Dear dear Miss Lavinia," she exclaimed, "I am so miserable, so bewildered, so completely at



my wits' ends, I hardly know how to tell you what has happened to me. First, you must know it is not ten minutes since I had an offer from Sir Percy Froth."

"You refused him of course?" says the old maid, hitching her chair close to the girl's.

"The wretch! Refused him? Yes, I should think so. But what do you imagine that he told me? And he referred me to you too; and declared you knew all about it."

"What was it?" asks Miss Lavinia, who understood perfectly well what Froth had been talking about.

"Why, he said Mr. Wharton was the son of a felon. Did you ever hear such a villanous accusation in your life? What *could* he mean by saying such a thing? Is there any foundation for such a calumny?"

"None whatever!" calmly and emphatically replied the old lady: and most sincerely did she believe her words to be true.

"I knew it was all a lie"; exclaims the girl, "a piece of wanton malice to injure Wharton in my opinion."

"I trust it has no effect of *that* kind," says Miss Lavinia.

"No," says Nelly, with a deep sigh. "It would take a great deal to make me think ill of him."

"I'm rejoiced to hear you say so, my love. You cannot think too highly of that young man. He is worth a dozen of your modish fellows. And as I always felt, dear Helen, he is the only one I should like to see you married to."

"O Miss Lavinia, don't talk of marriage. I have been engaged this six months." And the

young lady hid her face in her pocket-handkerchief.

“Engaged! Good gracious! and to whom pray?”

“To Northern. I can’t tell you how miserable I am. We are to be married at once. It is all settled. And the horrid lawyers are to have it all done as quick as possible.”

Miss Mumford was so shocked at this announcement that she was totally unable to reply. “You surprise me beyond measure,” she at last exclaimed. “I cannot say how this has taken me aback. I never expected it—never.”

“Nor more did I,” whimpers Miss Nell from behind the handkerchief.

“I do not wonder,” says the old lady, severely, “I do not wonder you are not happy, Helen. What poor Hugh will think of your conduct to

him I don't know: to me, I confess, it seems mightily unaccountable."

"Dear Miss Lavinia, please don't scold me," cries the fair penitent; "I am so unhappy, you can't think."

"That won't mend matters now, I am afraid."

"But is there nothing to be done? Papa thought you might be able to help us. If you were to speak to the duchess, or to Northern himself perhaps?"

"What in the name of goodness am I to say to them? The mischief is done, it seems to me; and there is nothing left but to make the best of it."

"I never can marry him, never!" cries Helen.

"Never marry whom?" asks the astonished elder, aiming her trumpet at the young lady's mouth.

"Why, Northern, of course," shouts Miss Nelly.

"Do you not want to marry him then?" asks Miss Lavinia, looking over the top of her spectacles with a penetrating gaze.

"Certainly not."

"Then the sooner you let him know the better. Why you have not done so already is past my comprehension."

"I couldn't. Northern was so impetuous. I meant to tell him a hundred times; again and again I had made up my mind to tell him. But just as I was going to speak this last time, he told me that everything was settled. And before I could recover from my amazement he was gone. It is so provoking. And poor Wharton too. Dear! dear! what is to be done?"

"Wharton will think himself very scurvily

treated, you may depend upon that. And I don't wonder at it neither," said she, unable to conceal her disappointment, or respect her grammar.

"But dear Miss Lavinia, I didn't mean to treat him so. Indeed I didn't."

"Do you mean to say that you intended to accept him."

"I don't know what I might have done if he had spoken to me," replies Miss Helen, archly.

"Am I to understand then, if you were free, and he were to make you an offer——"

"There, there," said Miss Nelly, giving the old lady a kiss, which was quite as significant as the Burleigh nod; "if you only get me out of this horrid business I will do anything in the world to please *you*."

Miss Mumford seeing now how matters really stood, turned her attention to the means of extri-

cation. After reflecting a few moments she said, "It is too late to do anything this afternoon: but I dine at Mr. Mombrun's to-night, where I shall meet Lord Northern and Wharton."

"Oh if you could but explain to Northern! But don't, pray don't, say anything to Wharton."

"If your engagement with Lord Northern is to hold, I insist on acquainting Wharton with it at once. I cannot be a party to any duplicity so far as he is concerned."

"Wait till to-morrow, only till to-morrow. If it is broken off, what use can there be in telling Wharton? And you *will* break it off, wont you, you dear old thing?" coaxed Miss Helen.

"I will see what can be done whatever. It is more than probable I may have no opportunity of speaking privately to Lord Northern at our dinner-party: but if I cannot do so, I will

make an effort to get to Midland House afterwards."

"You *must* go. Promise me you will go. I shall die if you don't go there."

"I think," says the old lady, grimly, "I shall die if I do go. However you may rely on my doing what I can. At any rate, I will make shift to speak to them all to-morrow."

"Ah, that will be too late. Northern will announce the marriage to-night; and as all London will be at the duchess,' everybody will be talking of it in a few hours. And,—and somebody is sure to hear of it, whom one would wish particularly to keep in ignorance."

"Well, well," said the old maid, smiling at the allusion to 'somebody.' "If you leave it to me, I will do my best for you, you may rely upon that."



## CHAPTER IX.

THANKS to the amiability of Mrs. Beswick, not to mention her comprehensive and indiscriminate admiration for marquises and earls, Chateau Mombrun—as Lord St. Kitts called it—was made to look clean and tidy for the grand occasion of the dinner-party. The generous lady had ransacked her store of upholstery, and spared nothing to gratify that universal fascinator of her sex—the great Mombrun. Besides this the good woman had slaved in the kitchen, together with Lizzy and Mrs. Mombrun, these two days past; and between them they had provided as good

a repast as any reasonable person need wish to sit down to.

Punctual to the appointed hour Miss Lavinia arrived in her one-horse chaise. Her dress was of snuff-coloured satin, with the waist immediately under the arms. She also wore a white turban. And although this costume was a little out of date, it became her extremely well; and, five and thirty years ago, was not in the least peculiar for a lady of her advanced age. Wharton was already in the house. But though both of the young noblemen were late, it was out of the question making any communication now, either to father or son, respecting the important intelligence which Miss Mumford had just received. Yet what a relief it would have been to unburden her mind at once. What a turmoil of anxious thoughts raged in the dear old creature's bosom.

And how imperturbably calm was her wrinkled face. Neither Mombrun nor Wharton could have endured suspense one moment, had they divined what secrets she was then and there possessed of. Just reflect what she had it in her power to tell them. To the young man she had to say, "Make yourself easy on one score; the girl of your heart does love you, there is no longer any need to torment yourself about that. But, unfortunately, she may be lost to you for ever. She is engaged to another man. He may give her up to you, or he may not. There is no calculating with certainty upon the actions of one so impulsive and capricious as he. In five minutes you will sit down beside that man; and you will hob and nob together in utter ignorance of the fate which is in store for either of you." For the elder, she had even worse than this to say. "Your secret," she might have told

him, "is known to the crafty man whose enmity will assuredly be equal to his disappointment. Froth has already partially avenged himself by revealing to Helen the mystery of her lover's birth. This is of little consequence. He has at last the power to injure you. To your son he will divulge the dreadful truth, which it has been the dearest object of your life to hide." How impatient most people would have been, if interested as she was in the upshot of these revelations, to bring about the climax which she had in some measure the power to hasten or postpone. It seemed as though she had nothing to do but take Lord Northern aside before they sat down to dinner, and simply repeat to him what Helen had said. He would at once relinquish all claims to Helen's hand. And in the twinkling of an eye Wharton would be the happiest of lovers ; Mom-

brun the happiest of fathers, and of hosts. But this wise old woman had some bitter experiences of her own which were never quite lost sight of. She was too familiar with that oft-quoted adage about the cup and lip. She had so often seen the wasp Disappointment gnaw the heart out of the sweetest and ripest fruits of promise and security. There should be no precipitancy on her part. No happiness should be marred through her want of caution. And as for the news she had to tell Mombrun, the longer that was kept back the better.

To judge by her tranquil features, no one would have dreamed how much stern self-control this patient and brave old soul was exercising. But her dear friend was glorious at the head of his table, with his nobleman on either hand. And Miss Lavinia watched him dispensing his hospital-

ity, gloating over his own good fare, quaffing his flowing cups, and roaring with boisterous merriment at his own exuberant jokes, till her admiring eyes grew moist with tender sadness. "He little knows," thought she, "what anguish is awaiting him." Now and then some passing cloud would cast its fleeting shade over Mombrun's broad glowing face; as if Miss Mumford's melancholy had some magnetic influence on his spirit. But these sudden changes were in truth habitual. He was at all times subject to fits of deep depression. It was the penalty nature exacted for the intense enjoyment she permitted him of all that is agreeable in sensuous life. Mombrun had at times an intense pleasure in mere existence. The inexhaustible supply of spontaneous vitality in the man—what is called 'animal spirits'—needed but the slightest stimulus to make him buoyant,

even under the heaviest care. Still however his bodily condition was more or less impaired by disease. He had long suffered from affection of the heart, and every thought of death made him cling more passionately to the life which was so delightful to him. At all moments therefore, the dread Phantom would cross his thoughts; and instantly he would shudder at its presence. "What an exquisite invention is life!" said he to Lord St. Kitts, who was sitting on his left. "How, blest mortals like you, can consent to die I know not. Had I half your appliances of enjoyment, I should be miserable with the constant fear of losing them. Even this paltry imitation of a happy hour makes life too exquisitely sweet to part with. Pah! How I abhor the pallid Fiend! Come, let's drown him in a bumper, my lord. 'Tis some of Lush and Boosey's best."

And the wine passed freely. St. Kitts grew very merry on it. And Wharton took his whack, for he was going after dinner to Midland House, where he would behold the lovely Helen. He spoke little; but his prospects, gilded with the bright champagne, grew mighty radiant; and quietly and complacently he revelled in their mellow tints. Lord Northern drank deep and thirstily. His pulse was feverish. His head was hot, and he tried to quench the fire by pouring on fresh fuel. No one was so uproarious as the noble marquis. He twitted Wharton for his silence; and toasted the girl, "the lovely incognita," whose charms their friend was dreaming of. He filled Miss Mumford's glass, and made her pledge the 'beautiful unknown.' She drank the toast with earnestness; but thought the young man's mirth was rather ghastly. He praised the liquor,



and drank success to Messrs. Lush and Boosey; and vowed, if ever he were duke, he'd fill his cellars with their generous wines. Mombrun should have the ordering. Mombrun should do whatever he best liked. Mombrun should be his butler—no, confound it! he meant his what-d'ye-call-him. D——me! Mombrun should be a bishop, if he liked. The young man was in tremendous spirits. He laughed at his own noise, and laughed when others laughed, and yet his merriment was forced. Only now and then he seemed genuinely amused with the polite and amiable conversation of Mrs. Mombrun. In truth, this lady's remarks were wonderfully inconsequent, and strangely remote from any subject which preceded them.

“Do you know Latin, my lord?” asks Mrs. M. (she had just been speaking about pork).

"Yes," says his lordship. "Your husband taught me Latin. Why?"

"Oh I thought you did," said the lady, "when I see your handwriting. I once knew a gentleman who knew Latin, and he wrote just like you."

Whenever she had the chance to speak, Mrs. Mombrun availed herself of it in this way. And although Lord Northern paid no attention to one half of her random cackling, occasionally the very inanity of it amused him. Still, as Miss Lavinia could perceive, the marquis' thoughts were far from genuine mirth. And as the evening wore on, the wine he had taken, losing its exhilarating effect, began to make him gloomy. Every five minutes he would consult his watch, and his impatience increased as the eventful hour drew nigh. How would Daisy bear herself

through the ordeal which his imagination was preparing for her? This would be the last time he was to touch her heart, the last time he was to make that heart bleed. There was pleasure—morose and cruel pleasure—in the contemplation of the pain he intended to inflict. She would suffer with him at all events; next to enjoying the same bliss, was the sweetness of suffering the same pain. He could endure his fate, nay, he could eagerly embrace any torture provided her torments were equal to his own. Was his an abnormal case? If not, who will pretend that love is an unselfish passion?

The looked-for moment came at last. Miss Mumford debated whether or not she should stay behind the others, and tell Mombrun how Froth had prospered in his enterprise. She saw, however, that her friend was in no condition to listen

calmly to the tale. His potations had kept measure with any of his friends'! In his eyes, the party had been a grand success; every one had enjoyed it. And never had Mombrun looked happier than now. He was full of gallantry to Miss Lavinia; and even kind and courteous to his wife. He was highly elated with the company of his noble friends. But notwithstanding his assiduous attentions to these, Miss Lavinia could see, any observant eye could see, that his thoughts were chiefly occupied with Wharton. This was the guest to whom he was solicitous to do honour. This was the guest for whom the fatted calf had really been dished up. In the midst of his most obsequious compliments to the Earl of St. Kitts, or his sycophantic flattery of the Marquis of Northern, from the corners of his eyes he would dart a stolen glance towards

his son. What did that son think of his father's—his unknown father's intimacy with these princes and grandees? Was the young man proud of his connexion with one so fashionably befriended? or was his self-sufficing democratic spirit insensible to the honour? Did he perchance despise the parent who robbed his children to gratify his own mean vanity? The object of these speculations was busy with speculations of his own. If he thought of his father at all, the idea produced neither admiration nor contempt. The feeling was one of all but pure indifference.

Yet on the whole, Mombrun had spent a happy evening; and the wise old maid deemed this no fitting moment for a painful explanation. She foresaw that when the three young men were gone, Mombrun would question her as to what she knew; her carriage being at the door, she

therefore made her escape before the others. Her host accompanied her to the street, and asked her there what further had transpired since their meeting. She evaded his question by desiring him to call upon her in the morning: she would then, she said, have more to tell him; for she was now on her way to Midland House, where she fully expected to hear news that would be more than usually entertaining.

## CHAPTER X.

EVERY avenue leading to the splendid mansion which our friends now sought, on their departure from the humble lodgings in Brompton, was choked with carriages of all descriptions, slowly moving on in endless strings, to set down their gay contents where the *elite* of 'Society' was concentrated for the evening.

Who can attempt to describe the magic effect upon the mind of one who finds himself for the first time within the portals of such a palace, ablaze with all the magnificence that boundless wealth and taste and art can furnish; crowded

with the most distinguished talent, the most dazzling beauty, and the most exalted rank, that the civilized world can draw together? Yet, what man is distinguished, what woman is beautiful, who is great in an assembly, where ministers are as common as the princes whom they serve, where from out a hundred lovely forms and faces it would drive a Paris crazy to say "pulcherrima!"? Let the vain, the haughty, and the ambitious, mingle in this blended crowd; be they what they may, they will find they are outmatched. The fable of the frog and bull will have its point for each of them. What is greatness where greatness is so common? Has that glittering gimcrack on your noble coat breast been the load-star of your life, my friend? Here, the distinction is to be undecorated. Have you strictly meditated the thankless muse? Go sport



at once with Amaryllis in the shade; for immortal genius is a drug, and ephemera are not more plentiful in Grub-street than poets and princes of the pen are here. Have you scorned delights and lived laborious days to win the flowing periwig and the ermined robe? Behold those pensioned chancellors! Chelsea or Greenwich will not turn you out a half-dozen of yellow-cheeked, moist-eyed old fellows, more blasted with antiquity! The women quiz them. Their doctors bolus them, and to-morrow they will be finished and forgotten! And you, my busy Quidnuncs, who, like the worms that perforate the sea-worn rocks, bore your way into society, was it to be thus snubbed, crushed aside, and made to feel the '*remorso del tarlo*' that you have laboured so persistently? And yet, contemptible as you are in this assembly, each of you is still a unit, and

who I ask is any more? Not even for a king do they beat the drums. For after all, "*ce n'est qu'un roi!*"

Who is that handsome old gentleman in pantaloons, endeavouring to squeeze through that furthest doorway there? He just now tried the other entrances in vain. Everybody seems to know him, and he has a courteous word for everybody. Forty years ago, he was a manager of the impeachment of Warren Hastings. One year after Nelson died, he was first lord of the admiralty. He succeeded Mr. Fox as secretary of state for foreign affairs, and leader of the House of Commons. You have seen him, I dare say (in Mr. Hayter's picture), addressing the lords in defence of Queen Caroline. By the way, that gentleman with the remarkable nose, now shaking him by the hand, was even more distinguished

than he in that great trial. The latter is an ex-lord chancellor, the former an ex-prime minister. Earl Grey's successor is in the room too, somewhere—the easy tempered, careless Melbourne. We saw him just now flirting with Lady de Grey. He is always talking to the prettiest woman he can find, and where is the woman who will not reward him with a smile? Ah! another hero in the ministerial line—the great anti-catholic statesman, the vehement defender of the Peterloo massacre, who carried the catholic emancipation. That great conservative leader, and champion of Protection, who, years after the present date, repealed the tax on corn. And must we not notice the “Great Warrior,”—the stern unflinching feudal-minded chief? How the silks and muslins rustle to make place for him! What female bosom can withstand this mighty conqueror?

Yes indeed! the world will long remember the military genius of the "Iron Duke," and, we'll hope, forget how strenuously "he opposed every great improvement, every great step in reform, and every concession to the popular wishes," which happily have become law in spite of him.

Look where we will, a hundred well-known faces peer from out this splendid crowd. Some, alas! not many, were to be seen this very season in those same rooms—filled now, in '69, with hundreds of new faces, as distinguished or as beautiful as those of five and thirty years ago. But these few remnants of a past so recently gone by—how changed from what they were! The oldest of them were then only in their prime; now, some of these—who were not yet in their cradles—would hardly believe that those withered fogies ever had a prime. Still less do they reflect what

five and thirty years will do for them. But *carpe diem* ! Be ignorant and blest !

In his father's house, it was not easy for Lord Northern to pass at once unnoticed to the side of her in whom alone he was concerned. Troops of friends arrested him, to exchange some trivial observation, and more than one noticed his flushed appearance and abstracted manner. Indeed, he could with difficulty compel himself to make coherent answers : his thoughts and looks were concentrated on that single point, and that point seemed to be one of general attraction.

Seated on a low ottoman, almost in the centre of the principal room, Lady de Crecy was surrounded by a group of admirers ; each of whom was awaiting his turn to make some brilliant speech, for which he hoped to be rewarded with a gracious answer. Never did she look more supremely

beautiful and fascinating than to-night. Whatever secret sorrows might harass her in solitude, here, with all the world at her feet, she could not be otherwise than forgetful of them. It was so natural to her to command this universal tribute, that, like a swan upon the sunny bosom of a crystal lake, she seemed to sport with pride in this her native element of admiration. Every movement was full of grace and majesty; and her soft melodious voice set all her utterances to music.

Lord Northern gradually elbowed his way to the spot where she was sitting. Great personages or little were alike indifferent to him, or rather all were equally objectionable; they were obstacles in his way—obstructions to be thrust aside, and with little ceremony he removed them. Quite unconscious was he of the resistance which crabbled

matrons and sturdy youths purposely offered to his progress. Amongst those whose persons and whose tempers he thus disturbed was Mrs. Seabright. This stout dame, feeling herself somewhat rudely hustled, turned sharply round to resent the treatment ; but when she saw who it was that struggled past her, she sustained a shock of another kind ; and hardly knew whether to give way to anger, or to accost the young marquis with civility. She had heard now the history of his dealings with her daughter. According to the version Mr. Seabright had given of the matter, his lordship was dying to repudiate his pledges. The engagement, in short, was practically void : and the offended mother was undecided whether to abandon hope and be spiteful, or to cherish it and be gracious.

It mattered little what her decision was : Lord

Northern did not even hear her speak to him ; and, what was worse, he actually did not notice Helen. For a minute or two he was wedged side by side to the very girl whose marriage with him it was his immediate purpose to announce. Miss Seabright spoke to him, called him by name, twitched him by the coat ; but he was as ignorant of her presence as he was of every one's else around him. Had Helen felt any lingering desire to become his wife, had she still faltered in her decision to be free, this last and decisive proof of Northern's utter indifference would have been sufficient to determine her. Nor could the mother fail to be convinced of the young gentleman's want of affection for her child. Both she and Nelly, with the unfailing intuition of women in such matters, perceived by the direction of Lord Northern's eager glances who it was that exercised



this powerful spell upon him. So far as Mrs. Seabright was concerned, no accident could have happened more destructive to her delusions, and consequently more favourable to the hopes of Wharton. Miss Nelly, who had exchanged signals of recognition with this gentleman, soon forgot the indignity she had just been made to submit to. For though she and her friend were separated by an impervious mass, she was quite certain that in due course of time the delicious moment would arrive. There was even comfort in this new and glaring evidence of the marquis' infidelity; it gave her courage to reject him although he should obstinately oppose her wishes; and with Miss Lavinia at hand to promote her interests, and Wharton also there to ratify and crown her happiness, Helen, notwithstanding all she had gone through that day, felt more in-

spirited and more joyous than she had been for months.

And now, Lord Northern is at Daisy's side ; at least, he has reached the inner ring of those who stand about her. Instinctively she knows of his approach before her eyes dare verify it. A sense of faintness steals over her. This is the moment she has for the last ten days and nights been dreading. She would not look in his direction could she help it : but her self-control is no longer in full force. Their eyes have met. What is in the young man's face, which tells her that he means to give her pain ? Lately his manner has been humble, submissive, sad, unobtrusive ; he has sometimes shunned her, watched her from a distance only. There is nothing of this subjection in his features now ; but in its stead, poor Daisy reads black ominous symptoms of a storm,

whose lightnings are withheld, to burst with double force on her. No wonder her wit is paralyzed. She hears with difficulty what they say to her. She contemplates retreat: but whither can she flee? Bah! what nonsense! She has terrified herself for nothing. He edges in, and makes his bow, and says his "How-d'ye-do?" as quietly as the rest of 'em. How her heart still beats with that imaginary alarm! Her silly heart! It almost takes her breath away. She wonders "Will he hear how nervously I speak?" and says, "I thought you did not mean to honour their graces with your company. Are you only just come?"

"I have been here a long time," says he, "but you are so surrounded, there was no getting near you."

"No, truly," says my lord of Brougham and Vaux. "We have here proof demonstrative of

Zeno's argument against motion. A body can neither move in the place where it is, nor out of it." His lordship's wit was neither heeded nor understood.

"It is very hot to-night," said Lady de Crecy, working her fan with a violence which was not likely to make it less so.

"Tis much cooler downstairs," said Northern.

"Won't you come and have some supper?"

"No thank you, I'd rather stay where I am."

"As a special favour," said Northern, bending over her and lowering his voice, so that she only could hear, "I entreat you to come down."

No answer.

"I have something most particular to say to you."

"Say it here." She felt as if every eye in the room was on her.

"Will you come?" he implored.

"Spare me," she gasped.

Those who stood around had tact enough to move away. The 'world' had long gossiped about these two; and fully believed all it said, and all it listened to. The 'world' therefore recognized the situation, and kindly looked the other way.

"You are mistaken," said he, "I meditated no insult, I merely wanted to announce my marriage. I thought you at least were a friend that would be interested."

She looked bewildered, as if she had not rightly heard him. "Marriage! with whom?"

"With Helen Seabright."

"Is it settled?"

"Yes."

Again a giddiness came over. "I had not

heard of it," she answered, hardly knowing what she said.

"You are the first that I have told. My father and mother know it, and were to publish it after I had spoken to you. My mother, who has watched my movements, will ere this have told a score."

"I hope she will make you happy." And with a sudden impulse she held out her hand. "With all my heart I hope it, Northern."

"Ah, Northern, my boy!" shouted Lord St. Kitts, "I wish you joy, old chap. This is an event. By Jove! caught at last, eh! Oh well is thee, and happy shalt thou be, and something else about a fruitful vine, and may you have your quiver full of them!"

Before St. Kitts had completed his congratulations another friend and then another came up;

and in less than half an hour the Marquis of Northern's engagement to Miss Helen Seabright was passed from mouth to mouth throughout that vast assembly.

"Come down to supper," said Wharton, offering an arm to Miss Lavinia, and speaking in her ear. She took the arm and went.

"What will you have?" he asked with characteristic reservation. She shook her head.

"Some champagne?"

"No."

"Some soup? Tea perhaps? Nothing? Come this way then. Where's your trumpet? You've heard the news?" he hisses down the tube.

"What news?"

"Helen's marriage."

"Yes, I heard it."

"Who told you?"

"She did."

"When?"

"This afternoon."

"Then you knew it when you came to dinner?"

"Yes."

"And never said a word!" His looks accused her of absolute malignity.

"I had too much to tell you either then, or now. Come to me to-morrow as early as you please."

"I've heard enough, quite enough. I wish to hear no more."

"You've heard nothing. Be patient till I've told you all."

A champagne bottle stood at Wharton's elbow; he seized it, filled a tumbler and emptied the contents at a draught. "Sudden!" he muttered between his teeth, "very sudden. This was the mystery, was it?"



He put his lips to the trumpet: "Did she say anything about Froth?"

Miss Mumford pretended not to hear.

"Did—she—say—anything—about—Froth?"

"She mentioned his name, I believe!"

"What did she say? That he had told her?"

"Come to me in the morning. I will impart to you everything I know."

"Thank you, I'd rather know to-night. Pray excuse me: good-night."

"Stop, Hugh, for God's sake!" But the old lady called in vain: Wharton had flown up the steps, pushed his way through the crowd, and was at Helen Seabright's side, before Miss Mumford had limped across the room.

What was to be done? The poor old maid began to contemplate her appointment with Mombrun. What would she have to tell him? In

Wharton's or in Helen's cause she had as yet done nothing. She had essayed to obtain a word or two with the duchess. The attempt had failed completely. She hobbled through the crowded chambers, and hunted for the duke. Lady Selina had informed her that his grace was probably behind the scenes, having a quiet hit at backgammon with his friend the squire-rector. Deep was the woe depicted on her solemn countenance, as Miss Lavinia found herself so powerless to stir a hand or foot for those she loved so dearly. Wearied and worn out with anxiety and bodily fatigue, she turned away to order her carriage and depart. "He will see her," she consoled herself by thinking, "and demand an explanation. She will, if pressed, tell him the truth, as she told it me. He must find comfort in the knowledge of her love, and the rest will follow. To-morrow

I will see the duke and duchess ; and bring this troublesome business to a happy end." Poor old soul ! little didst thou dream what that morrow would bring forth.

But Mr. Wharton was undertaking the management of his own affairs. Helen sees him fighting his way towards her. She pretends to take great interest in the small talk of a spooney ensign in the guards, who had not heard of her engagement, but who had heard of her fortune. Miss Helen laughs in the wrong places, and blushes, and is altogether so nervous, that young Spooney thinks, "Heavens ! how captivating she finds me." The engineer is not a man of ceremony. He goes to the point at once, and gruffly.

"I have to congratulate you, Miss Seabright, on your approaching marriage with Lord

Northern," says he. "I had no idea that it was even contemplated."

Miss Seabright's serenity and her blushes take flight together. "Didn't you?" she stammered; "I—I wanted to tell you, some time ago."

"Indeed! Then you have been engaged a long time, I suppose?"

"No, no,—that is not very long."

"Was it a sudden affair then?"

"Yes,—very sudden. But——"

"Hm! I think I know of something that helped to make it so."

"What did you say?" timidly.

"I say" (emphatically), "I think I know why you acted in such haste." (This terrifies and confuses Miss Nelly, so she makes no reply.) "Your aversion to one lover increased, I suppose, your preference for the other."

“You are mistaken if you mean aversion to yourself,” says Helen, boldly.

“Had you said so yesterday, I should have been fool enough to believe you.”

“It is as true now as it was then.”

“Evidently! In other words, it was never true at all.”

Miss Helen bites her fan, and wonders whether it would be expedient to weep.

“No, never true!” says he, fiercely. “Mere indifference would not account for your treatment of me. A hundred times over you have all but confessed, in so many words, that I was more to you than any other. What your words have not spoken, your looks and manner made as plain. I forbore to press my hand upon you a second time, because I fancied there was some hidden cause which led you to restrain me.”

"It was so," interrupted Helen.

"And the mystery, which so long perplexed me, is at last unravelled. You deliberated between two suitors: and resolved at length to take Sir Percy Froth's advice, and fling aside the associate of a criminal."

"Heavens! What perversion!" exclaims Miss Seabright. "Is it possible that you can ascribe such motives to my conduct! You little know what I have undergone, or you would not think so hardly of me." At this point the tears began to flow.

"My only means of judging you," says he, "is by your acts. You cannot recall the expressions you have used to me, you cannot deny that you are engaged to Lord Northern now, and you have already admitted to Miss Mumford the interview with Froth which immediately preceded your be-

trothal. You may feign surprise at my inductions from these simple facts ; but it happens that I was not totally unprepared for this sudden sequel. I have long been aware of Froth's design to injure me in your esteem, and am not ignorant that he has recently been exerting himself to follow out a false track, in the hope of inculpating me in a crime of which I do not even know the history."

"For goodness' sake," pleaded Helen, eagerly, "disabuse your mind of these preposterous delusions. If I could but tell you the truth, you would see how cruelly you are deceived."

"Most cruelly deceived !" repeated Wharton ; "but you will not deny that I, at any rate, speak truth. Is it, or is it not true, that Froth accused me as I say ? You hesitate : of course ! I knew he had."

“And do you think I was influenced by anything that he said about you? You may fancy you have cause to think that I have behaved ill, for you are utterly in the dark about the whole concern; but you ought to know me too well by this time to suppose I would listen to any accusation against *you*, whom I have been intimate with—all my life; especially if it came from such a man as he is.”

“Whatever influence his charges may have had upon you, certain it is, you have acted as though I deserved your enmity. What is done cannot be undone. You have chosen your lot, and I sincerely hope it may turn out a happy one. As to the gentleman who has thought proper to asperse my name, perhaps his ingenuity will enable him to afford me some explanation; at all events, I shall lose no time in seeking it.”



Mr. Wharton made a stiff obeisance, and turned to go.

“Pray,” cried Helen, “pray don’t quarrel with him. On my honour he has not altered my feelings towards you.”

“He has altered my feelings towards him though. And depend upon it, it will not be long before I tell him so.”

With which words the angry lover turned his back upon her, and was gone.

## CHAPTER XI.

AT an early hour on the following morning, Viscountess de Crecy called upon Miss Helen Seabright, to congratulate this young lady upon her coming marriage with the marquis. We reverently abstain from any attempt to portray the conflict of emotions which poor Daisy may have suffered, when, in the solitude of her chamber, she pondered over the intelligence which, to say the least of it, had taken her by surprise. That this conflict was not otherwise than severe may be surmised by the extreme wanness of her lovely features. These effects of mental suffering were so conspicuous

that Helen noticed them the moment her friend arrived. Neither can it be at all necessary, after the reader's close acquaintance with this lady, to affirm that whatever the process of that mental struggle may have been, the issue could only be consistent with what he already knows of her courageous character. She was indeed as happy as a martyr at the stake. The transition phasis might not be termed enjoyable ; but the reward of an unsullied conscience, and the hopes of peace to come, in some measure compensated the present pang. Of the two women, both of whom unkind Fortune had converted into butts for her slings and arrows, or both of whom, to speak more plainly, were suffering, in different ways, from the protracted consequences of those capricious impulses for which their sex is so remarkable, Lady de Crecy was the happiest. She at all events had

acted from the beginning in obedience to her ideas of duty: Miss Helen, I fear, had been guided rather by her love of pleasure. There was no consolation in the thought that she had missed her aim, because she had shut her eyes when taking it. She blamed Northern, to save her conscience; but conscience told her the fault was hers alone.

"To think," said Daisy, kissing her, "that this should come to pass, and I, dear Helen, never even to suspect it."

Lady de Crecy was surprised to see that Helen's eyes looked red, as though that very morning they had been strained for other purposes than sight. There was no brightness nor enthusiasm in the young girl's manner. She answered gravely that the engagement had been made at Tinselby.

“What! when you were there this winter?”  
asked my-lady in astonishment.

“Yes just before we left.”

Daisy’s thoughts flew back to those last few days. Every event was fresh and vivid. She well remembered that final scene in Northern’s chamber; and guessed at once its consequences.

“Was it,” said she, “the very day before he left?”

“It was,” says Nelly, dolefully.

“I thought so. How happy you ought to be, dear Helen.”

“Yes I ought.”

“You have known him so intimately all your life: there can be no foolish illusions—as there mostly are; and therefore no disappointment.”

“No, none,” mechanically replied the other.

"I suppose the marriage will take place directly ? "

"Oh no, certainly not immediately. There is no sort of hurry : and there is a great deal to be done before that."

"You wish to retain your independence as long as you can," said Daisy, smiling. "Well, they say there is no time so happy as that before marriage."

"That doesn't sound promising."

"I mean," says Daisy, colouring, "when marriage is in prospect."

"That depends," says Miss Helen, thinking of her own case.

"Yes, of course," says my-lady Daisy, thinking now of hers.

"Do you mean to go abroad ? "

"Nothing is settled yet."

"How odd!" says Daisy; "I should have thought you would have talked over all your schemes, and have determined everything."

"No" (sadly), "we've not talked much about it."

"I must say, you have not talked much together before others, whatever you may have done in private. It only shows how stupid one may be, and how impossible it is to guess what people may be thinking of. Do you know, dear, I used to fancy—don't be angry with me for saying so, I used to fancy that it was not Lord Northern that you cared for, but somebody else."

"Did you? Who can you mean, I wonder?"

"Well, now, I imagined Mr. Wharton was the happy man. You seemed so much together lately: then to be sure, he is such a very old friend of yours. I suppose that alone made you indifferent to each other," laughing.

"Dear no! He is not the least indifferent to me—that is, the more one knows of him the more one likes him; which one can't say of everybody, can one?"

Lady de Crecy called to mind her husband, and confirmed the proposition. "But feeling that," she added, "and seeing how devoted the gentleman was, I wonder—though to be sure one cannot marry two husbands," which possibly she thought a pity.

"One is quite enough," says Helen, "if he is the right one, and too many if he is the wrong."

"Yes, indeed. But we will hope that you whatever have made no mistake." And after another quarter of an hour of such colloquy, the two ladies fondly embraced, and separated.

We will now accompany Wharton in his morning visit to Sir Percy Froth. Before they



meet, however, one word about the baronet. His business with this little tale, or with the personages who figure in it, is pretty nearly terminated. We are about to part with Froth. And little as we may have found in him to admire we may perhaps compassionate the end to which his self-indulgence had at last reduced him. After his conference with Miss Seabright, Sir Percy's hopes of maintaining his position in society were for ever wrecked. He fairly looked his prospects in the face. On every side they threatened him with destruction. There was but one course left open. He resolved to sell out of the army, and leave England, never to return.

Unscrupulous as he had shown himself where anything was to be gained by his sacrifice of others, he was above the meanness of mere spite. While Wharton stood in his way, his hatred was

so far roused that he vowed, whatever happened, to be revenged upon his rival. And it is true that in the heat of angry passion he had fulfilled that design, even when nothing was gained by it but revenge. Still the act was not deliberate. And when all chance was up, he ceased to consider it worth his while to pursue Wharton for the sake of pure malignity. In the remorse which took possession of him when the game he had so long been playing was lost, when his shrewd intelligence convinced him what a mistake his career had been, when he contemplated the ruin which he was necessarily about to bring on friends who had confided in his friendship and his honour, he was too utterly wretched and broken down to think of harming Wharton. To be fair towards him, this last consideration,—the robbing of his friends,—galled him most of all his

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troubles. Yet such is the inconsistency of human nature, the shame and infamy which this act involved led him to dally for some minutes with the thought of suicide, but never prompted him to surrender the £9,000, or thereabouts, which he would obtain by the sale of his commission.

Nothing could be more pitiable than Sir Percy's state when Wharton called upon him, the day after the party at Midland House. As the engineer was shown into the room, Froth was sitting at his breakfast-table. No one would have supposed the baronet to be a bankrupt. Every luxury was, as usual, displayed before him. Loch-leven trout, and potted char, delicate rashers spread on a miniature silver gridiron, peaches, grapes, and other dainties, all served upon the finest Sèvres. But, except the tea, the luxuries were untasted. The baronet's head was clasped between his hands;

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his elbows rested on the table; and he seemed to gaze into the *camera obscura* of the future, trying to focus there the images of events, which his sick fancy was prolifically engendering. He did not heed the entrance of his visitor, until the name of Wharton had been twice announced. Even then, he roused himself with effort; and turned to receive the engineer with a look of irritability which showed his annoyance at the intrusion.

Wharton made a formal salute, and began by saying, "I am fortunate in finding you at home, as the object of my calling is one of considerable interest, and admits of no delay."

"Indeed! I am not aware," said the baronet, breaking a morsel of toast into his tea, "what interest you and I can have in common, Mr. Wharton."

"Then, with your permission, I will at once remove your ignorance. You called on Miss Seabright yesterday, I think?"

"Well?"

"And you made some statements with reference to me, which, if I am not mistaken in their tenor, are entirely at variance with the truth."

"That is your deliberate opinion, is it, Mr. Wharton?" Sir Percy fished up the morsel of sopped toast, and transferred it to his mouth, with the utmost care and precision.

"It is, Sir Percy Froth; and as you seem so perfectly at your ease, I have no doubt you can afford me a satisfactory explanation. If you cannot——"

"Well?"

"Why, I shall *take* the satisfaction which you deny me."

"H'm," (Sir Percy smiled.) "You are quite a Sphinx, sir. But if I mistake not, your words are meant to couch a threat."

"There can be no mistake about it."

"Ah!" (coolly,) "it is not *always* easy to get by foul means what we fail to obtain by fair. True, some men have a turn that way." The venom in the baronet's tone and manner stung Wharton quite as sharply as the words.

"Be careful what you say," he threatened, half choked with rage, "or by God! I'll pluck the lying tongue out of your throat, and silence you for ever."

Froth left his seat, and moved quietly towards the bell. Wharton perceiving his intent sprang before him.

"No," said he; "before I quit this room, explain the lies you told Miss Seabright; or name

the hour and place of meeting, where we can settle our accounts without auditing them."

"Fool!" ejaculated the baronet, contemptuously. "You force me to admit that I spoke the truth."

"That I—I, Hugh Wharton, participated in a crime for which Mr. Mombrun was tried? This is what you said to her?"

"I said nothing of the kind."

"You lie, you scoundrel. She confessed that you thus impeached me."

"Hands off! hands off! I told her nothing but the truth, I say: I told her, not that *you* committed the felony, but that you are the son of one who did. I told her you are the son of a man who changed his name to hide his guilt: and I told her what was true."

"You told her what was false. My father

was a mere acquaintance of Mombrun: he was drowned soon after I was born; his memory is as free from taint as any ancestor's that you can boast of."

"I once thought as you think: that is, I believed the fiction which was imposed on you. I will treat you frankly, now that we are on the subject:—your courtesy deserves it! You and I were rival candidates for the Longthorpe plum—pray don't interrupt me; it has fallen into the mouth of a bigger man than either of us; but that is nothing to the point. So long as I considered you the obstacle to my interests, I was naturally desirous to remove you: were I disposed to retaliate the polite epithets you have lavished on me, I might plead affection for Miss Seabright; and pretend that my regard for her, was in itself enough to make me thwart her marriage with one I deemed



so far beneath her worth as you. You smile derisively. As regards my estimation of yourself you are too sceptical, I assure you. Well, in casting about for a suitable petard wherewith to hoist your gentle character, I remembered that my father told me how a man named Wharton had been accused of felony; I fancied, indeed I hoped, that this was you. For some time I indulged in this agreeable error; but in hunting up the evidence to convict, I found, to my dismay, that you were innocent; and that the guilty Wharton was your father."

"Proofs! proofs! give me proofs of what you say," gasped Wharton, staggered no less by this appalling assertion, than by the effrontery which in some measure seemed to guarantee it.

"I could furnish you, *seriatim*, with the whole evidence as I procured it, but the process would

be tedious. Allow me to refer you to Miss Mumford. If you wish for further testimony, apply to Mr. Joyce. If these are not sufficient, inquire of Mombrun himself : and should all these sources of information fail to *satisfy* you to your heart's content," (Sir Percy placed his hand upon his breast, and bowed with mock civility,) "on the honour of an officer and a gentleman I promise to give you whatever satisfaction you require." Sir Percy now rang the bell; and Wharton, who was utterly dumfounded, slowly went away.

He paused, however, at the door, and said, "I accept your pledge, Sir Percy Froth. If you have deceived me, I shall soon be back again. If you have spoken truth it will be your turn to demand reddition. Be assured that I will not refuse it."

## CHAPTER XII.

THE rude shocks, which the sturdy engineer had received within the last twenty-four hours, had severely tested his habitually stern composure. He was now as little able to repress his feverish anxiety as though he had never practised self-control. It was not that these trials had come upon him without warning : he would probably have met the discovery of his parentage with his wanted stoicism, had it not been for its conjunction with his loss of Helen ; now however the disappointment of his master passion so perverted him, that he ascribed this loss to the disclosure of

his origin. And, anticipating the truth of Froth's assertions, began already with bitterness to accuse the duplicity, as he deemed it, of those whose affection for him had made them hide the truth. Such is the cruel tyranny of this one passion,—called the “tender.” Whatever our estimate of men may be, however surely founded upon long and strict experiment of them, let this disturbing cause come into play, we must begin *de novo*, and compute our reckoning upon a new analysis.

On leaving Froth, Wharton hastened to the lodgings of Miss Lavinia. The fatigues of the previous night had kept the old maid in bed. The young man had therefore to wait some time before his summons could be obeyed. Miss Mumford however, did not detain him until her toilette was completed, but hurried to him in her flannel dressing-gown; and (what a proof of

her respect for his impatience!) instead of her brown front, she wore a thin shawl over her sparse and snowy locks. Her appearance was rather weird, but still unusually venerable. She kissed the young man's forehead, and made some apologies for her dishabille. He disregarded her remarks, and began his attack at once.

"I little knew," he said, "when I parted from you last evening, how much I had to dread from the schemings of a malignant rival. Had I suspected the fatal truth which I have since discovered, I might perhaps have been prepared for the blow which has shattered all my happiness."

"What mean you?" exclaimed Miss Mumford. "What truth? What discovery? What is it you allude to?"

"Oh," said he, with savage irony, "you, of course, do not understand me. You are not

aware of any secret, the revelation of which could injure me in Helen's eyes, or otherwise embitter my life with unspeakable regret. Oh no, you, who knew my father so well and lamented his *untimely end*, would never have misled the orphan whom you nurtured for *his* sake. You ! who did not know that my father is still living, and that the fiction of his drowning was invented to deceive his son ! Alas, Miss Mumford, the kindness was mistaken. The misery you have prepared for me would have been averted had I been taught the truth, and trained from childhood to forgive it ; had I been told that my father was not only the associate of a felon, but was himself the perpetrator of a heinous crime ! ”

“Hush ! Hush ! Irreverent and ungrateful boy ! ” exclaimed Miss Mumford, seizing him by

the arm. "Do not, in my presence at all events, revile the parent whose life has been a sacrifice for yours. Vent your disappointment and ungenerous reproaches upon me, if you think that my conduct towards you, these six and twenty years past, merits such reward : but do not dare to shock my ears with impious charges against your noble father. I *did* know all that you have now discovered. It was my intimacy, my compassion, my love for him, that induced me to befriend his child : and no man ever deserved such a poor return for all his goodness more thoroughly than he. You are provoked, exasperated beyond measure, at your loss of Helen ; but after all, dear Hugh, I hope the loss is but imaginary, a little patience and——"

"Imaginary !" exclaimed the indignant lover, recalled by this unlucky word into the wrathful

mood which Miss Mumford's rebuke had nearly quelled; "Imaginary loss! Is it thus you calculate the depth of my attachment? Do you talk to me of patience, when I am driven mad by a combination of the cruellest reverses that ever burst upon an unsuspecting man! What a fool's paradise I have been living in! Why, why did you not warn me that I was slumbering on the brink of such a precipice? Why was I brought up to revere a phantom of my own imagination at the expense of a living father, whose character no filial tie has saved me from despising? The father that I have loved and honoured, was buried years ago beneath the waves. The father I have alighted and disparaged, lives to blast my prospects with his own misdeeds."

"Hugh! Hugh!" ejaculated Miss Mumford.

"Yes," said he, "I know how true your friend-



ship has always been—how true to him, how true to me. Dear Miss Lavinia, do not imagine that I want gratitude. The fondest of mothers could not be more to me than you have been. I love you, as a son should love; but I cannot transfer the natural veneration which from childhood I have cherished for the memory of——”

The sentence was cut short by the entrance of Mombrun. Something like a blush suffused the cheeks of the surprised old maid. Following her womanly instincts, she retreated towards her bedroom; but the intruder begged her to remain.

“My dear friend,” he cried, “why run away? These flowing robes are very graceful; and methinks Aurora has laid her rosy fingers on your cheeks this morning. Come, if this young gentleman is to be trusted, you need not flee from one old enough to be his father.”

Miss Lavinia turned back to welcome him. His last words drove the former from her thoughts, she said nothing; but her countenance was even more grave than usual.

"What's the matter?" asked Mombrun, "you look like ill-paid mutes at a winter funeral. And yet you were vociferous enough before I entered. I knocked and knocked, but could get no answer; save my young friend's voice in vehement declamation. I suppose he was expatiating on Miss Helen's charms. I'm all agog to hear what happened at Midland House last night."

"Miss Mumford," said Wharton, solemnly, "perhaps it would be as well if you leave us for a few minutes together. The subject of our conference must be somewhat painful; it will be less so for all concerned, I think, if we two are quite alone."

Miss Mumford at once retired. Ere she quitted the room, she cast a lingering glance behind her. Her look was full of anguish: it seemed to implore the headstrong son to be gentle with his father; and for Mombrun, it spoke the tenderest sympathy. The remembrance of that glance was with her when she died.

Mombrun himself divined immediately that his secret was discovered. The shock was no less sudden than severe, and seemed to produce an instantaneous effect upon him physically: a deadly pallor suffused his face, while heavy beads of perspiration bedewed his brow. He breathed with difficulty; and the quick motion of his hand to his heart, indicated too surely the presence of disease.

Wharton was so wrapped in his own meditations that his father's gesture and aspect entirely escaped him. When the door was closed on Miss

Lavinia, he was the first to break silence. "I have this day heard, for the first time, that you, sir, are my father: I suppose the information I have received is quite correct?"

A pause.

"It is," said Mombrun, almost in a whisper; then added with effort, "I had hoped you never would have known it. I had also hoped—too fondly hoped, that if ever you did learn the truth, it would be less mortifying to you, than it seems to be."

"It could scarcely be otherwise than it is, sir. You taught me to respect the memory of a father, whom you also led me to believe was long since dead. It is not easy at my time of life to uproot natural affections, around which one has piously trained every association which could make a father's memory dear."

“God forbid your natural affections should be effaced! The ties of blood alone stay up my hopes. Think of me as you will, you are still my son, I am still your father. O Hugh! can you not bestow some fragment of your shattered love on me? What debars me from your heart? What did that imaginary father do to earn the love, which all my life I have strived so hard to win?”

“At least he did nothing to forfeit my esteem, sir,” was the sullen answer.

“And I have done nothing,—nothing that you know of, to win it! No, my acts of love have been forced within the poor limits of self-negation. Since the hour of your birth, I have cherished a father’s fondness, only to suppress it. As you lay within your cradle, I used to watch beside you; and brood upon the love which dared never seek

return. The smiles upon your infant face were only signs to move my tears. And as you grew, so grew my fondness; and with it, the increased necessity to conceal the strongest—perhaps the only virtuous passion my heart has ever known. For your sake, I supplanted myself, and set a counterfeit in my place, to rob me of all I prized on earth. For your sake, Hugh, I gave up my name; conscious that the change would seem to justify the accusations for which, before Heaven and you, I swear I was unjustly tried. For your sake, I have denied myself whatever could make a misspent life endurable. You have been the first in all my thoughts: and treat me as you may, Hugh—you will be the last.”

The old man’s eloquence was lost upon his son. Wharton listened; but he was thinking mainly of Helen Seabright.

"Come, my boy," Mombrun softly said, rousing the other from his reverie. "Say that you forgive me a deception, from which I have suffered, and you have only gained."

"Unfortunately," said Wharton, "I have suffered irreparably—not from concealment, but from revelation of the truth. I have reason to believe that the circumstance of our relationship has effectively operated to mar the happiness of my life."

"How so?"

"Miss Seabright has suddenly accepted the hand of Lord Northern. A few days since she intimated to me, that I alone might hope for hers. The suddenness of this change followed immediately on Froth's declaration of your secret. I do not know whether one can say *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, but it looks very like it."

"What!" exclaimed Mombrun, with an ex-

pression of horror. "She has thrown you over, accepted Northern, and all because she learns that you are a son of mine! O my son! my ——"

"You are ill, sir. Help! Miss Mumford! Help! Help!"

Mombrun had staggered, fallen upon his face, and lay upon the floor—a corpse! . . .

How those poor deaf ears had been straining behind the door, to catch the summons which now has reached them. How wildly the desolate old woman rushes in, and flings herself upon the lifeless body. She knows too well the meaning of its pulse's stillness. She knows that pulse will never beat again.

"You have murdered him!" she says, with terrible distinctness. "You could love none but a dead father. You have conferred that title now on *him*!" And for the first time for many a long year, she sobbed.



The awful presence of death is sufficient in itself to engross the mind. The most thoughtless, and the most reflecting, are equally appalled at sight of it. What is it? A beginning, or an end? Change, or annihilation? There is no answer to the question. The gaping jaw makes no reply; the glazed eye has no meaning, except death.

Wharton was horrified at the tragic catastrophe which the severity of his own conduct had brought to pass. Every other consideration was now banished from his thoughts. He contemplated the fearful spectacle with terror and dismay. He did not yet take in the full reality of the event. But as soon as he had recovered presence of mind, he hastened off to fetch a doctor. In a quarter of an hour he returned. Miss Mumford had not stirred from the position in which he left her. She had closed the staring eyes, but still knelt at

the dead man's head. We can imagine how she may have touched the lifeless hand, or the clammy brow, perhaps, with her trembling lips. We can imagine how she may have prayed, as there she kneeled. We drop the curtain upon these solemn passages of sacred love, and sorrow, and holy aspiration. All feeling hearts can paint them, better than the finest pencil.

The doctor took but little notice of the body : he seemed to think that she, who crouched beside it, was much more worthy of attention. "Come, ma'am," said he, kindly, "leave this young man with me, to do what is necessary here ; and get you to your bed. Your cheeks are flushed, and " (feeling her hand) "skin feverish. Go and lie down." Then turning to Wharton he whispered, "Look after the old lady, the shock has been too much for her."

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE shock had been too much for her. The best medical advice was speedily called in ; but Miss Lavinia's illness was long and serious. For several weeks Wharton saw nothing of her. Not a day however passed, but he was in and out her lodgings two or three times, to learn what progress she was making. His father's death affected him more deeply, as he gradually called to mind the countless instances of devotion which Mombrun had shown towards him. As is often the case, he had been insensible to kindness while it lasted, and valued it only when it was lost to him

for ever. He did what he could to make amends for past neglect. He placed his step-mother in comfortable circumstances, and interested himself about her children. He set to work to ascertain the extent of his father's liabilities; and honourably discharged every debt, both great and small.

While these duties engaged his mind in healthy occupation, he carefully abstained from vain regrets about Miss Seabright. The sharp edge of his disappointment had been turned aside at the critical moment. And continuous anxiety for Miss Lavinia, interest in his new-found relatives, and a certain sense of retributive discipline which his habitual sternness imposed upon him, combined to dissipate any morbid hankering after an object, which he had ample reason to believe was false to him, and happy in possession of another.

In this conviction, he avoided every chance of accidental contact with Miss Helen ; and as he never met those who saw either her or Northern, he was completely ignorant when the marriage was to take place ; and indeed, of every circumstance connected with it. Once or twice he had been within an ace of stumbling upon Helen at Miss Mumford's. As soon as the old maid's illness became known to the Seabrights, Helen insisted on nursing her ; and so far obtained her parents' permission to do so, that she came every day for four or five hours ; and cheered the old maid's bedside with her bright and gentle presence. Before Wharton was aware of this arrangement, he one day entered Miss Lavinia's sitting-room just as Nelly left it for the inner chamber. In fact he saw the skirts of her dress, as she passed through the door-way ; and knowing,

as he then did, who it was, he fled from the house, as though a fiend were at his heels. Another time Miss Nelly was coming down the staircase as Mr. Wharton was going up. There seemed no possibility of evasion. On the landing however the engineer perceived a door a-jar. Without pausing to consider, he rushed in; and this hiding-place served a purpose, for which it never was constructed. After this undignified adventure, our friend took care to ascertain who was in the house before he entered it; and Miss Helen performed her friendly offices without again incurring a risk, of which she had been quite unconscious.

Would she have been as anxious as her lover to avoid a meeting, think you? Heaven forbid, that I should detract from the pureness of her motives for such sedulous attendance on Miss Mumford.

But may not some *arrière-pensée* have soothed the irksomeness of the many dull and silent hours, which she passed in watching? Was it any fault of hers, that Mr. Wharton's affection for the old maid brought him so often to inquire at her door? How could she avoid wishing for an opportunity to remove the erroneous and injurious impressions which this young man was labouring under? Of course she wished for such an opportunity. But unfortunately it would not come. Day after day the gloomy engineer called to hear the last accounts; but he always put the question (Miss Nelly put her head over the bannisters and heard him), "Was any one with Miss Mumford?" The answer being "Yes" he would forthwith depart. And then, had he looked up at the window (which he never did), he might have caught sight of a pretty little face, sadly peeping from behind the

curtain. For, Helen's sorrowful eyes always followed his retreating steps; after which diversion, she went back to the sick-chamber, with a heart almost as heavy as the poor old invalid's within it. It was dreary work for this sprightly natured young creature, to be moped up here, in dingy London lodgings in a dull street, nursing a heart-broken old woman, through the suffocating days of an unusually hot July. One would not have given the girl credit for half so much pertinacity,—not even in the pursuit of pleasure. But the trouble she had gone through, had had its uses; and Miss Nelly was a deal more thoughtful, and more staid, than she had been before. She stuck to her post with the sincerest fidelity to Miss Lavinia, and she was determined, moreover, not to throw away a chance of recovering the treasure, which through her own folly, as she now acknowledged, she had



deserved to lose. And if she hoped to win back Wharton, are we to infer that she was free to do so ?

Let us go back, to the great party at Midland House. You remember how Miss Lavinia was unable to find the duke, and how Lady Selina told her, that his grace was playing at backgammon in retirement with Mr. Seabright. The truth is, these two elderly gentlemen were having a quiet chat about their children. It was rather ludicrous to see how comfortable they made themselves, over a business about which the young folks were so disconsolate. They were closeted in the duchess' boudoir, and sipped their tea and laughed as though the matter were a pleasant joke.

"The young donkey !" says his grace, alluding to his son, "as if a scrape with one petticoat ain't enough, he must entangle himself with two."

"Yes," says his reverence, "he is worse off than the ass of Buridan—he don't want one of the bundles of hay, and he can't get at t'other."

"Well, parson, we mustn't be too hard on the boy; you and I were just as bad once, I dare say: the women always made fools of us. Why, man, it is but yesterday, you were as crazy after that black-eyed wench we met at Rome, as my lad there is about my lady Daisy."

"Yesterday!" returns the parson, "why that's five and forty years ago, pretty nigh. How time flies to be sure! Ah well, we mustn't talk of what we were then, Midland. Ha, ha! Do you recollect playing the bugle out of the diligence window, all down the Corso, that morning we left for Naples?"

"Ay, when you drank so many bottles of Orvieto, that you would have it the coach was

topsy-turvy, and tried to stand heels up on the floor of the coupé, to set it right again."

"Fy, fy! your memory's too good be-half, old friend. But they were merry days, too. And a mad lot we were. Heigho! There aren't many left to tell the tale now though."

"No, in truth, not many. They keep dropping off one by one: there's Jack Harvey and little King both gone this year. Do you remember Jack jumping over the drawing-room table that night we gave the young men's dinner at Brooke's? Poor Jack! he's pretty near the last of the lot."

With such pleasant reminiscences, the old *boys* amused themselves till they almost forgot the present. Mr. Seabright however recalled the duke's attention to it.

"Well," he said, "what's to be done about

Northern? We mustn't let these children run their heads into a noose, which once drawn can't be loosened. Suppose you send for the boy, and let us speak to him here."

"Egad!" cries the duke, laughing, "there'll be a pretty kettle o' fish when it all comes out. There's her grace as pleased with the prospect of the marriage, as if an heir was already on the stocks. I'll be bound she has announced the match to every man and woman in the house. Drat it! parson John, better let well alone, sir: they'll make a doocid fine couple, and happy enough I warrant, by the time they've filled the nursery."

"No, duke, no, my Nelly has set her heart on another mate. Depend on it, they will both of 'em be the happier to be off the bargain. We must talk the duchess over quietly. She'll be all in

favour of the love match, when she hears the story ; no fear of that. And as for the world at large, neither you nor I care a fig what they say about it. Come, let me ring for Northern."

"Ring away," says the duke. "If Nelly wants to be out of it too, that settles the matter." And the groom of the chambers was dispatched in search of the young delinquent.

When the young man responded to his father's summons, he was not a whit surprised to find the duke in company with Mr. Seabright. It was but natural, that the two fathers should confer together. Probably they had been discussing the important but highly uninteresting question of settlements, and were now about to acquaint him with their decision. He prepared himself to be vastly bored by what he had to hear ; and accepted his situation as part and parcel of his martyrdom.

"We must ask your pardon," says the duke, "for taking you from your lady-love ; but you'll see enough of each soon, I dare say ; meanwhile the parson here has a word of good advice to give ye. Come, John, tell the boy what we've been talking about."

"As to the advice," says Mr. Seabright, "I think 't will be well enough if it don't come too late."

"I hope not," said Northern ; "I must be in a bad way, when I am past listening to your guidance, Mr. Seabright."

"Then let me counsel you, when next you marry, first to obtain consent from the lady's father."

"Good heavens !" cried Northern ; brightening up, "you are not in earnest surely ? I never—why, I took for granted that Helen had asked for your consent."

"You mean, you took for granted that I should give it?"

"Well, yes, I did," said Northern, sheepishly.

"Ah, there was your mistake. I am sorry to disappoint you; but, as I have just assured your father, I neither do nor will permit this match."

"Really, Mr. Seabright, you surprise me beyond measure. I never counted on the possibility of your refusal. Of course I should be the last man in the world to set so respected a friend as yourself at defiance. If I had only guessed—but I hope Helen is prepared for your opposition. You are aware that my mother has already given out our marriage as a *fait accompli*?"

"Yes," says the parson, still keeping his countenance, "I am aware that I am pretty near the last to hear of my own daughter's engagement, but I am quite certain my child will never dream of

opposing me, at least in an affair of such vital consequence. I know her dutiful heart well; she will obey me, I feel confident, without a struggle."

"I am afraid you count too surely on your parental authority. I trust, I am sure, that you may not be deceived."

"Why zounds, sir!" cries his grace, "is this all you have to say? you trust he may not be deceived indeed! What the deuce do you mean by that, you young jackanapes? If I was in love with a pretty girl, like Nelly Seabright, do you think I wouldn't make a better stand for her than that, sir? Down on your knees, you young hypocrite, and tell the parson how you love her."

"He knows my inflexible and relentless temper too well," says Mr. Seabright, "to suppose, that even for his sake, I would sacrifice the happiness of my only child."



"Indeed, sir," says Northern, "I would never ask you to risk dear Helen's happiness, for *that* (I give you my word and honour) weighs more with me, just now, than my own."

"Egad, sir," cries the duke, "one would think you wanted to be off the match, and were only marrying the girl out of pity instead of love."

"My father puts constructions on my words which I hope you, Mr. Seabright, will not impute to my conduct."

"I own your language sounds somewhat frigid," says Mr. Seabright, with feigned resentment, "but I can assure Lord Northern, that my daughter has no desire to accomplish her happiness at the cost of his. In truth, I may even go the length to say, that nothing but a sense of honour binds her to a pledge, in which she was much too hastily involved."

“Is it possible?” exclaims the marquis. “Can I have been so blind? Do you mean to say that Nelly repents her acceptance of my offer,—that she actually adheres to her word, out of mere punctilio? and that too, at the price of her own peace of mind? Good God! what a dolt I am. But you do not imagine I would be so unfeeling as to hold her to such a contract? What a mercy I have discovered this in time——”

“Here, here, where are you off too now?” calls the duke.

“Off to, sir? Why to release her at once, to be sure; and bid my mother contradict the stupid report, which has been so falsely circulated. O Mr. Seabright,” exclaimed the youth, seizing the clergyman by the hand, “how grateful I shall ever be to you for this frank and generous disclosure! How miserable I must have been when

it dawned upon me that Helen had become my wife from a sense of duty only. Dear, dear Helen! How rejoiced I feel to be able to restore her to freedom, and release her from a bond which I can too easily understand must have been insufferable to her. Pray forgive me for the uneasiness I have caused you: but not a moment shall be lost; I will see, and set her free, at once."

When the young marquis was gone, the two elders burst into a roar of laughter.

"Well," cried his grace, "I have set many a rascal in the stocks and let many a rascal out of 'em; but I never saw one so pleased to escape a whipping, as that boy was to be off his marriage."

"And all for the sake of Nelly," laughs his reverence.

"I take it, parson," says the duke, "you have made many a couple miserable for life by joining

'em together, I warrant you never made a couple so happy by separation."

And this, I dare say, was no exaggeration of the truth. Not all Wharton's perversity could outbalance the joy which Miss Helen experienced, after her explanation with Lord Northern. For this however she had to wait till the following day. Unluckily for her, she left Midland House before the conference concerning her destiny was concluded; and when Northern sought her, she was nowhere to be found. Next morning she was troubled with a bad headache, and took her breakfast in her own room; so that, not even from her father, did she learn the joyful news. When Lady de Crecy called, Helen had seen neither of her parents; and, as we know, she was by no means in a cheerful state of mind. Scarcely was her friend gone, when the marquis himself arrived. She

soon divined, by his altered looks and manner, that his presence was due to her father's interference. She had no wish now, that he should detect her anxiety to be rid of him; and slyly feigned dejection, which he nevertheless, was sharp enough to see through.

"To think," said he, taking her hand, as soon as they were alone, "that I should, all this while, have been breaking my poor little Nelly's heart."

"I suppose," says Miss, "you never considered that your poor little Nelly had a heart."

"I own," says his lordship, "that I deserve reproach. But at last I confess my sins, and am here to make you all the reparation in my power."

"Indeed!" says the young lady, artfully, "I don't know what reparation you can make. If you didn't care for me, it would have been better for us both, had we never been engaged."

"Strangely enough, my dear Nelly, those are the very sentiments I was about to give utterance to, and in the very words which you have used. I had an interview with your father last night—I dare say you know all about it, though?"

"Not I; I have not seen my father this morning."

"Well then, would you believe it? He refused to consent to our marriage."

"Really!" exclaimed Miss Helen, with admirable surprise, "on what grounds did he object?"

"Must I confess them? He pleads his daughter's own wishes."

"Well, you cannot expect me to be desperately in love with a man who is desperately in love with somebody else, can you?"

"And you cannot expect *me* to be desperately in love with a woman who *et cætera*," rejoins his

lordship. The whole truth was now quite clear to both of them. Miss Helen blushed and smiled: her companion laughed, and said, "Come, Nell, we used to have no secrets from each other; suppose we revert to our old terms. We have been friends all our lives; let us remain so, eh?"

"With all my heart."

"Well then, as you want to marry some one else, and as I don't want to marry at all, the sooner our engagement is contradicted the better."

"I am afraid every one at Midland House must have heard it announced last night."

"They will have twice as much to gossip about, when they learn 'tis broken off then."

And with some very candid expressions of their mutual delight, and a cordial demonstration of restored affection, they parted happier than they had been for a long time.

When Lord Northern was seeking Miss Seabright on the previous evening, his friend Mr. Evans came up to congratulate him on the marriage. Evans had his own reasons (you see he was no wiser than he should be) for rejoicing in the approach of that event. His astonishment was great, when he heard Lord Northern deny the assertion which he had received direct from Lady de Crecy.

"But," said he, "Lady de Crecy told me, not five minutes since, that you had proclaimed it to her this evening."

"So I did."

"And you have changed your mind *since* you spoke her?"

Evans had two meanings to his words, and conveyed them by something like a sneer.

"No, I had not the trouble of changing my



own mind, that was done for me. Mr. Seabright refused his consent."

"On what grounds?"

"For the best of reasons, viz., that Helen wants to marry another man."

"Wharton?"

"I suppose so. You look disgusted: but I did my best to follow your advice; the Fates wouldn't have it."

"You are heart-broken of course?" said Evans, laughing. "I'm sorry for you." And the speaker walked away in quest of Lady de Crecy. She however had left, as quickly as she could, after the communication from Lord Northern. Evans therefore had to wait till next day. He called on the viscountess soon after she returned from visiting Miss Seabright.

"I am so glad you are come," said Daisy. "I

expected you would ; so I gave orders not to let anybody else in. The fact is, I have got such a headache, that I could not see anyone but you."

"The effects of last night, I suppose?"

"Yes; but you needn't grin in that impertinent way. It was the heat of the room that made my head bad."

"Oh, I see. Well, were you yourself surprised at what you told me?"

"No; how could I be, when I knew how hard you had been working to bring it about?"

"And are you not grateful to me for my pains, and my success?"

"Yes I am," said the lady, earnestly; "for whatever share you may have had in the business, I am most grateful. You do not know what a relief it is to my mind." Lady de Crecy sighed deeply.

"To see him made *happy* for life?" said Evans.

"To see him made happy for life," she replied.

"If I had really helped to accomplish this for your friend, I do think I should be worthy of your friendship."

"Why *if*? You have helped: and you do deserve my friendship. You shake your head. Rely upon it, the advice of those we esteem may often decide the act we contemplate, but want the strength of purpose to perform. This was your service in the present instance, and" (playfully) "as I am generous enough to acknowledge, you need not underrate it."

"What if I had failed altogether?"

"Things would have been no worse than they were before."

"I am glad to find you so philosophical. Your friend is neither settled, nor happy."

"Alas! I fear it must be so for a time: yet I do hope and believe that Helen will make him a good wife. Do you think she is very fond of him?"

"I know that she is not."

"How can you know anything about it? Are you her father confessor, too?"

"Not I: but I know she is in love with that engineer,—Wharton, isn't his name?" replied Evans.

"It did look like it, I admit. But why are you so positive?"

"Because Northern assured me it was so."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Is it possible? Do you mean to say he is jealous of Wharton?" stammers the lady with faintest suspicion of a blush.

"Not a bit," said Evans, who noticed the alarm.  
"So far from that, no miser ever discovered a hidden treasure with greater joy."

"Heavens!" cries Daisy, "how shocking! What is to be done?"

"The kindest thing I suppose, would be to let Mr. Wharton know of his *bonne fortune*."

"Tell him that he is beloved by another man's wife! Ah, my friend, do not jest on such a subject. My heart sickens at the bare thought of these miseries."

"But why should she not be his own wife? That would dispel your scruples, I suppose?"

"Unfortunately," sighed Daisy, "her marriage is settled now."

"Unfortunately!" sighed Evans, "it is nothing of the kind. After you left, last night, Northern himself informed me that the whole

affair was at an end. And this it is which I am here to tell you."

Mr. Evans looked into Lady de Crecy's face as he delivered this sentence. The surprise was too sudden for poor Daisy: she had no time to prepare a mask. Evans read the momentary conflict that was passing in her mind, and he read unmistakably the joy which the lovely culprit could not conceal.

"Ah!" she said, "this is most unlucky. We are no better off now than we were before. To think that Mr. Wharton should thus mar all. Really it is *too* provoking!" and her ladyship rose and walked to the window, to hide the wicked satisfaction which her wicked wicked heart could not but feel.

## CHAPTER XIV.

To return to Helen Seabright : we see now, that she was quite at liberty to indulge in the sweetest hopes respecting her indignant lover. But how to compass a reconciliation with one who so carefully avoided her ? There was nothing for it but to be patient. Until Miss Lavinia was convalescent, any assistance from her was out of the question. It was not even practicable to converse with Miss Lavinia, during the first two weeks of her illness, upon a matter so alien from her own meditations. Helen, and indeed all the Longthorpe and Tramways people, knew now of the

Wharton and Mombrun relationship; and also that the sudden death of the latter was consequent on the son's discovery. Miss Seabright had too much tact therefore, to remind the suffering old maid of the tragedy, which had so bereaved her, by allusions either to her own interest, or to the young man in whom they were bound up. But when Miss Mumford began by degrees to regain her strength, her concern for the young people gradually revived. She had not forgiven Wharton for what she still regarded as his brutality: but the desire to see these two united had grown into a habit with her. She felt moreover that it was the dearest wish of her lost friend. And against Helen she had no grudge, but, on the contrary, was filled with gratitude for the girl's attentions. When in course of time Miss Lavinia came to talk freely with Helen on the subject, the



old maid's advice was, not to be in too great a hurry for the meeting. They must, she said, give Wharton time to recover the double blow of his father's death, and Helen's acceptance of the marquis. She knew him, she said, better than any one else knew him ; and there was something hard and intractable in his nature, which it would be dangerous to excite. When once he had made up his mind, his obstinacy would induce him to sacrifice everybody and everything to his purpose. They must bide their time, and if he did not relent when he found that she was not to marry Northern, it would then behove either her or Helen's father to seek a reconciliation. Mr. Seabright fully accorded with this view, and Helen's mamma was too ready to acquiesce in any arrangement which postponed a marriage, that she still consented to reluctantly.

There was one romantic dame however, who had more sympathy with poor Helen's anxiety for the future ; nothing, we regret to say, could be more inconsistent than the conduct of the Duchess of Midland. During the first two weeks of Miss Mumford's prostration, her grace came every day to inquire after her old friend ; and finding Miss Seabright assuming the dull and onerous office of nurse, she generally prolonged her visits to cheer the girl with her society. The Duke and Lord Northern and Mr. Seabright had entirely convinced her, of what she had long believed, viz., the attachment between Miss Helen and the engineer. She already knew that her son's affections suffered nothing from his loss of Helen. Much therefore as she longed for him to marry, much as she had rejoiced when she heard of his engagement, her sympathy entirely followed the

inclinations of the young people. She listened to Helen's story with the deepest interest. She heard of the engineer's conduct at her house with the most painful emotion. This foolish matron mingled her tears with those of the disconsolate maiden, as though the world had never witnessed a real heartrending love affair till now. And as to waiting as Miss Lavinia proposed,—bless her! she wanted to be off there and then, and drive straight to Mr. Wharton's lodgings, and bring the refractory youth back in her carriage, and restore him and his Nelly to the arms of Love, and bliss and happiness immortal.

Lady de Crecy was another of Miss Mumford's visitors, when the latter's health sufficiently improved. This lady also was mightily sympathetic. It is surprising what eagerness she showed, to bring about a happy settlement between the

lovers. She took rather a different view from either Miss Lavinia or the duchess.

"I think," said she, "Mr. Wharton ought not to be allowed to brood over his imaginary wrongs ; and as Lord Northern is the supposed obstacle, it seems to me that he is the one to explain. If the duchess would ask him to call on Mr. Wharton I am sure that it would all come right."

As Miss Lavinia had no objection to this scheme, her grace hastened to put it into execution. The marquis did not hesitate to comply. He felt so thankful for his recovered freedom, and altogether so lighthearted, compared with what he had been, that he was pleased to do any good-natured act for anybody. In truth, he felt himself quite a benevolent and virtuous and useful member of society.

You may rely upon it, Wharton was not a

little astonished at sight of his noble friend. The proud spirit of the engineer prepared to receive his aristocratic rival with anything but cordiality.

"I would have looked you up long ago, old fellow," said the smiling marquis, "but I did not like to intrude upon your affliction."

"You are very considerate," says Mr. Wharton, stiffly. He was not sure which affliction his lordship meant.

"Pardon me, Wharton, if I grieve you by untimely allusion to a painful subject; but do tell me about your poor father. He was such an old friend of mine. Were you aware of his heart complaint?"

"No, I did not see enough of him to know of his ailings. I was not conscious, until a week or two since, of his near relation to me."

"So I understand. I hope therefore the wrench has been less severe to you than it would otherwise have been: in short, that your interest in matters which before concerned you, is unabated."

Wharton looked suspiciously at the speaker. "I have returned to my business," said he curtly, "but that was interrupted for a few days only."

"It is not exactly business that I refer to," said Northern. "I came to speak with you of something even more important."

"There is nothing more important to me, that I can think of."

"How about Helen?"

"I do not understand you, my lord," says the other frowning. "If you come to triumph over me in my misfortunes, let me tell you the moment is ill-chosen."

"Well now! Did ever a man show such churlish gratitude to a benefactor? I came to resign my pretensions to your lady love, and you treat me with scorn and anger."

Northern expected Wharton to rush into his arms with joy. He was mistaken.

"What cause you may have, so soon to renounce a woman who has just consented to become your wife, is not for me to inquire into," said the engineer, coldly. "Possibly you, like others, may have seen some instance of her fickleness: for my part, I have had enough of it; and with many thanks for your obliging offer, I decline to resume what you, or any other man, has cast away."

"Oh very well, all right, my dear fellow, all right," says the marquis, slightly nettled at the other's cavalier manner. "Don't imagine that I want to cram the girl down your throat. I

thought you were in love with Nelly Seabright, or depend upon it, I would not have come here to bother you about her."

"Whatever sentiments I may once have entertained towards Miss Seabright," returned the haughty engineer, "I could neither feel respect nor tenderness for a girl who has proved herself so unworthy of both. As the whole subject is excessively distasteful to me, Lord Northern, I beg as a favour that you will change it now, and not renew it hereafter."

"Never fear, my dear sir. I had hoped for Helen's sake that the explanations I had to offer, would more than remove the difficulties which are rankling in your mind : but upon my word—for Helen's sake—I begin to think, things are better as they are."

"As upon this subject we are agreed, there can



be no need for any further communication between us," says the other. Whereupon the two gentlemen separated, with feelings more akin to hate than friendship.

It had been arranged, that the Duchess of Midland should meet Helen and her father at Miss Lavinia's, on the day of the interview between Northern and Wharton; so that the whole party were awaiting the upshot with the keenest anxiety. Northern repaired straight to the old maid's lodgings, and reported the above conversation word for word. It may easily be imagined, how the news fell like a thunderbolt amongst them. Poor Helen burst into tears at once; and in the profundity of her distress, charged the untoward result of the mission to the hastiness of Lord Northern's temper. Miss Lavinia was also disposed to think, that a little

more patience with the engineer's natural displeasure would have been judicious. The duchess shed a few tears, because she did not see what else was to be done. And Mr. Seabright, who never would view things on their gloomy side, declared it was a very 'pretty quarrel,' and almost made him wish to be in love himself.

As to the young marquis, he was extremely sorry to see poor Nelly so unhappy ; but he could not resist telling her—what he sincerely thought—that Wharton had "a devil of a temper," and was utterly unworthy of the affection which she was "flinging away" upon him. There was not much comfort to be extracted from a speech of this kind : indeed, its chief effect was to make Miss Helen more miserable, and more in love than ever.

And now, if we go back to the stubborn gentle-

man who was so unnecessarily inflicting this distress, we shall find, with all his pretended stoicism, he was by no means so placid as he would have us believe. It was all very well to thrust Miss Nelly from his thoughts while she was the property of another: this was quite the correct thing to do, and we give him full credit for his virtuous pertinacity; but here she was, free again. And what had happened to set her free? Fickleness indeed! might it not be constancy? Here was a notion to inflame his stifled longing. Here was a spark to set the muffled embers of his passion once more aglow. Northern had explanations to offer,—more than adequate to soothe his indignation. Why did he refuse to listen to them, and judge for himself of their validity? His infernal pride had stopped him;—that pride which was for ever playing the mischief with his better judg-

ment. Yes, he saw it all now—Northern had discovered Helen's love for him; Helen had confessed it to Northern; of course she had. O the darling! What an idiot he was! If he could but see her: if he could but secure five minutes with her alone, etc.

But the committee of ways and means, which sat daily at Miss Mumford's house, had provided for this much desired end. As it was known to Miss Lavinia that Wharton called everyday, but declined to enter when Miss Seabright was within, it was arranged that Miss Seabright should not be there when Mr. Wharton came next day. Fortunately Lady de Crecy's sister lived within a street or two of Miss Lavinia; nothing therefore was easier than for Miss Seabright to lunch there; and whenever Mr. Wharton arrived, a messenger was to be dispatched forthwith in quest of the

young lady. In the course of the afternoon, the dejected engineer rang at Miss Lavinia's door, with a throbbing and anxious heart. How great was his disappointment, when, in reply to his usual question, he learnt that Miss Mumford was alone. The old maid was even more reticent and mysterious than usual. Her secret delight to find the young man so penitent was intense; but her countenance was as impassible as ever. She let fall no hint of what was in store; and when presently Miss Seabright was announced, she expressed the most natural surprise, and exclaimed,

“Bless me! Who'd ha' thought it? I wonder what Helen will say at meeting *you* here.”

Miss Nelly, who had prepared an elaborate justification of her conduct, found all her wits desert her the moment she was in her lover's presence. And Mr. Wharton, who felt as if the girl must be

aware of every unjust thought with which he had been wronging her, stood like a criminal about to receive the doom, which he knows is his desert. So nearly did Miss Helen lose herself, that she was on the point of saying the meeting was unexpected. Mr. Wharton however, was able to make this satisfactory remark without a breach of truth. Helen replied with much simplicity, "She was very glad to see him." Wharton explained that he had not made the observation by way of apology, for, he also was highly rejoiced to meet Miss Seabright,—had indeed earnestly desired to see her; and if Miss Lavinia would—that is, if Miss Seabright would grant him the opportunity, he had a few words to say—which—

"Which you would rather no one heard, except the person they are addressed to," submitted the elder lady.

And does the reader desire to hear those “few words?” Can he or she not easily imagine what passed, when the old maid had left this happy pair alone? If the compiler of these annals had not sufficient reliance on your imagination, dear friend—for whom the tale is told, to be confident that your fancy must from first to last be more powerful than his pen, long since that instrument would have shrivelled in the flames. To this brilliant fancy he now leaves this tender scene. Picture it as it suits your taste. Picture it as though you yourself were one of the actors. Picture it from your memory, or from your future prospects. That either one source or the other may infallibly supply you with the requisite experience, is all that your humble servant has left to wish for.

And the other lovers, in whom perhaps you take a parting interest,—what of them? Did they live

“happy and comfortable” henceforth to the end of their days? Did all their trials and troubles end where ends our story? Alas! trials and troubles may be softened and diverted by the novelist; this, as we have elsewhere intimated, is his business; to end them, is beyond the function of his art. He may, at will, call in the “abhorred shears,” to cut short the sorrows of his *fantoccini*; but here at least, the artifice is unneeded. At Lord de Crecy’s age the “thin spun thread” soon wears out itself. Between four and five years, these other lovers had to wait. But for my part, I used to think the present Duchess of Midland as bright and beautiful at seven and twenty, *i.e.* when she married the Marquis of Northern, as at any period of her life. And his grace—the present duke, will forgive me for deeming him a wiser man after that interval, than when I had



the honour of first introducing him in these pages. That the period over which our narrative extends was, if not the most eventful, still the most trying to 'Daisy' and to 'Northern' we need have little doubt. For the whole five years that elapsed, between the scene in the marquis' chamber at Tinselby and the death of Lord de Crecy, Northern never again distressed poor Daisy with his love. And during that time, Daisy was also free from the sallies of her husband's jealousy. In every way, she reaped, as was her due, the sweetest fruits of innocence and virtue. How much these attributes, which caused the hot-headed young marquis such fretting for a time, contributed finally to his happiness, needs no description from the moralist.

Miss Lavinia, contrary to expectation, survived her bereavement some years—long enough what-

ever, to stand godmother to the present Marquis of Northern : not that this infant nobleman then enjoyed that illustrious title, for the late duke lived to play with his grandchildren, as he used to play with little Miss Finch ; and his duchess bore him company to the last.

Once only did we hear of Sir Percy Froth after our last meeting with the baronet. He was then in Australia. His career had been eventful. He had embarked his capital—some £2000 (the remaining £8000 were lost at Homburg)—in a mercantile house at Sydney. Owing to a series of disastrous speculations, which he as a partner had led them into, the house failed. From a state of bankruptcy, Sir Percy passed rapidly to one of destitution. For a brief space, he was employed as clerk in a shipping office ; but finding confinement irksome, he took to horse and cattle driving

up the country. He subsequently kept a small hotel at Port Philip; but being an indifferent manager of his affairs, and his tapster being a good one, they eventually changed places. The latter took the hotel; and the last time we heard of Sir Percy Froth, he was billiard-marker to his former servant; his complexion much impaired by bibacious habits, and his coat, alas! sadly the worse for solution of continuity, about the cuffs and elbows.

FINIS.

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